New Light On Why Prima Donnas Behave So Outrageously

Psychology Explains That They Can Be Good If They Want But That Knowledge of Their "Mental Inferiority" Constantly Causes Them to "Cut-Up"

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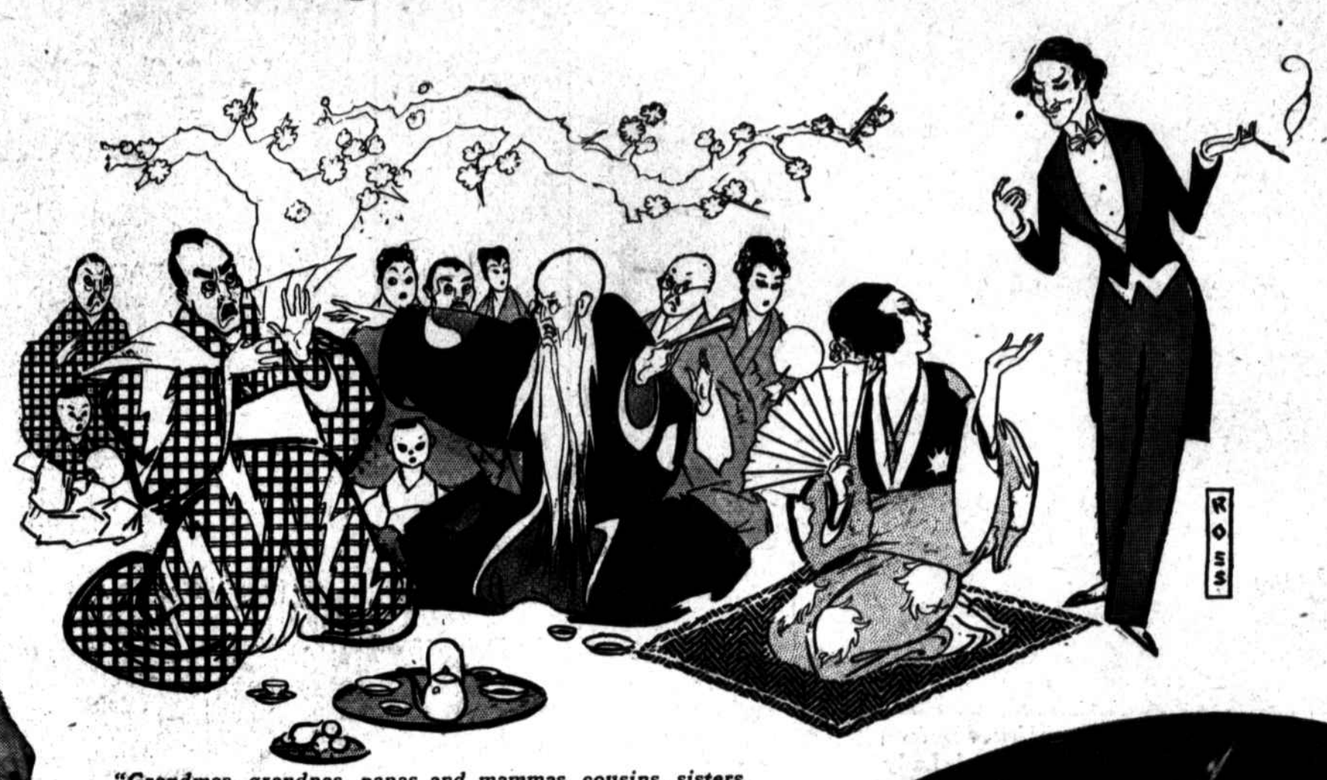
Geraldine Farrar, Who Temperamentally Threw Her Husband, Lou Tellegin's, New Clothes Out of the Window All Over the Sidewalk in Front of Her House as a Prelude to Throwing Out Her Husband Himself.



"Grandmas, grandpas, papas and mammas, cousins, sisters, nieces—all the Miura clan—solemnly debated the astonishing question whether their prima donna daughter should be allowed to sail away with her romantic accompanist and leave her indignant husband behind. And they decided that her 'artistic temperament' demanded it, and that the husband must sacrifice his feelings upon the altar of art!"

Madame Tamaki Miura, the Japanese Prima Donna, Who Sailed With Her Accompanist and Left Her Husband Home.

PHOTO BY STRELECKI.

Madame Ganna Walska, Whose Surprising Marriage to Harold F. McCormick, Chicago Multi-Millionaire, After Divorcing His Friend, the Equally Rich Mr. Cochran, Is the Latest of Her "Temperamental" Outbursts.

PHOTO BY GOLDBERG

Mlle. Amazar, Who Was the "Inspiration" of the Famous Russian Baritone Baklanoff and Who Also Got Him Into a Peck of Trouble.

WHENEVER any well-known grand opera prima donna has divorced her latest husband because she has grown, perhaps, to dislike his complexion or the cut of his clothes, or has lifted another lady's husband out of his wife's heart and broken up a happy home or two, or has done various other things which if ordinary people did them would be called outrageous, inexcusable, selfish, childish and even immoral, the prima donna has not expected, nor has anyone else expected her, to suffer any of the consequences which would follow if ordinary folk did such things.

This is because prima donnas—and indeed all great artistes—are supposed to have a mysterious something called "temperament" which makes it impossible for them to behave like everyday human beings.

And so we have just the other day a solemn family verdict in conservative Japan upon the case of Madame Tamaki Miura, a Japanese prima donna under contract to sing in this country with the Chicago Opera Company.

Madame Tamaki, besides having a ravishing voice, has a husband. She has also, it appears, an accompanist, Signor Franchetti, tall, dark, romantic and Italian. The Japanese prima donna, true to form, announced that she would sail away with her romantic accompanist, and as she didn't want to be bothered by any husband during her trip, Mr. Tamaki would have to stay at home in Japan.

Mr. Tamaki could not see this. He could not see at all why his wife should go gallivanting abroad with another man while he stayed at home and looked after the hearth fires. So Mr. Tamaki raised up his voice and protested bitterly, calling for his government to refuse his wife and her accompanist passports, and to administer a public rebuke to this lady who would go a-voyaging so independently and unconventionally.

But the government shook its head. Madame Tamaki was a great prima donna and artiste! She had "temperament." The authorities suggested that Mr. Tamaki call a family council upon the case, because the laws and statutes provided in such cases by Japan were inadequate when it came to judging "temperament."

"Artistes are not to be judged by ordinary standards," was the verdict of the combined councils of the Miura family. "Let the lady sail with Franchetti. Let the husband stay at home."

And the lady, Madame Tamaki, did sail with Franchetti, and the husband, laying down his hands with true Oriental fatalism, said: "It is decided. It is what a husband must expect when he marries an artiste."

But the Tamaki verdict has had a very beneficial effect. It has directed the attention of men of science anew to this matter of "temperament" and the validity of the claim that those who possess it just can't help doing outrageous things, and therefore must not be censured, criticized or punished for doing them.

And Dr. Andre Tridon, easily the foremost psycho-analyst in America, whose latest book, "Psycho-Analysis and Love," is the last word upon the hidden secret sources of emotion and its various forms of expression, presents on this page not only the new scientific but the common-sense view of the subject.

Up to now science has been inclined to take the point of view of the artistes themselves. It has been said that their blood supply, their nerve supply, the very shape of their heads and their brains, will not let them do anything else than what they so frequently do. Dr. David Edgar Rice, formerly of Columbia University, has been a leader in this school. He has written that the abnormally developed sensory centres of the artiste's brain absorb such a large supply of blood that there is not enough left over to nourish the higher inhibitory or forbidding centres of the brain which regulate conduct.

The brake of the artistic automobile, as it were, is lacking. Therefore, when they get married too often or, again, forget to get married, it is not their fault. Listen now to Dr. Tridon:

"Stuff and nonsense! The artistic temperament? An insufficient blood supply to the inhibitory centres, making it impossible for artistes to be conventionally proper—ah, bosh! Artistes, women singers who throw things down, from vases to lovers, can be just as good and virtuous as little school teachers pegging away at their Latin for twenty-five dollars a week.

"When Calve refuses to come out upon the stage and sing because the director doesn't bow low enough to her she can help those artistic tantrums if she wants to. But she doesn't want to.

"When Ganna Walska marries Alexander Cochran and then promptly divorces him she is not spurred on by any inevitable physiological compulsion. She can keep the peace and hold the fireside even with that erstwhile confirmed bachelor Cochran if she wants to. But she doesn't want to. When Emma Eames divorces the artist Storey, her first husband, and then rapidly marries the singer Gorgoza, to whose wife she is said to have paid one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, she could manage along with the first, perhaps rather shopworn husband, perfectly well only she doesn't want to.

"Any female singer of them all, even the most erratic, can act just as usually as you and I can. Except that they have made up their mind that the chief comfort in life of being an artiste is to be able to do just as they darn please.

"Calve, struggling along as a hard-worked, ambitious, striving little French girl; Geraldine Farrar, working hard and not sparing herself; Eames, Nordica, Ganna Walska—all the entire tribe of female artistes—and male as well—have had one obsessing thought at the base of their brains as they agonized to reach the top. That thought they said to themselves in hours of hardship and hours of weary work, said it over and over, nursing the idea to their hearts, cherishing it like a beloved wife of an adored husband:

"'When I get there—ah, then—I will raise Cain!'

"That was the idea which cheered them on as a beacon light cheers on the sailor fighting the mighty ocean. That idea made it possible for them to endure the hardships most artistes have to endure to reach the ultimate goal. 'When I get there, ah, then—I will be free. I'll be mightier than the herd then. I'll—in that blessed day be a law unto myself!'

Take, for instance, Baklanoff, the member of the Chicago Opera Company, against whom, a few years ago, Mlle. Amazar, his sweetheart, whom he had courted in America, brought various charges of immorality and fickleness. Baklanoff's answer to those charges typifies to perfection the artistic defiance of 'What are you going to do about it? I live on a plane of my own, a state toward which all the little beginners strive with sweat on their brows and yearning in their hearts.

"For Baklanoff very frankly said what he meant and what he lived by.

"'An artist must live through the emotions in order to portray them,' said he. 'That's why there should be a separate code for the temperamental and the artistic. One love affair for an artist is not sufficient. It's experience that counts. Give me plenty of romance and fond looks and tender caresses, and I can sing with much more power and beauty."

"It is the inferiority of the artiste that makes her wish to break the law.

"For the artiste is an inferior person, and subconsciously, at any rate, knows that she is inferior. She always feels it in her own heart, except for the short time she is on the stage making a loud noise. Therefore, being an inferior, the artiste is a cut-up. All cut-ups are inferior. It is the superior person who doesn't exploit himself or his loves nor play the great games of life contrary to the rules.

"Now," says Tridon, "let's have, first, an analogy. We all have met the cheap motorist, driving the cheap flivver, who crowds on all the gasoline, steps on the accelerator and whirls by the Rolls-Royce that drives along leisurely, conscious of its power, and therefore feeling no need to demonstrate it. That cheap motorist is a cut-up as he crowds the costly limousine to the curb. Similarly the artiste, indulging her erratic power over her worried world, is also trying to demonstrate to herself and her spectators what a rumpus she can make, and be permitted to make, now that she has arrived. The artiste, disobeying the rules of good manners, love and marriage and life, is a very close sister to the flashy automobile driver.

"'Artistes don't have to act as they do, but if it makes them happier to act so for Heaven's sake let them!'

"For if we weren't tolerant of these artistes we would have to do without their singing, probably. Because it would be amazing, to many of us, to find out the truth. That is, were the goal of license, whims and utter liberty—at the top—removed, few singers would struggle to reach the top for the sake of music alone. If we forbade them, therefore, they would have no incentive to keep on and furnish us beautiful art.

"For we should look at the facts calmly, in cold blood. The private life of the singer is of little moment to the world. But her singing is of the greatest moment to the world, to culture, to art, to all the finenesses of living. So let her cut up all she wants to. Psychology, the whole long history of human nature, has taught us psycho-analysts that most artistes have been drunk with something before they did their best work. Maybe they were drunk with wine, maybe drunk with drugs, maybe just drunk with a lover. So, surely, if a little Cain-raising will make them drunk and help them to their most exquisite tones, why then, in Heaven's name, let them raise Cain.

"The reason why the women singers are so much more troublesome and erratic than the men is because they feel less sure—always—of their position. We have a theoristic equality between the sexes now. This equality, however, is only in theory. Practically, men are still gods, and women inferior beings. Therefore, generally, when a man has reached the top in opera he is secure; he may feel reasonably sure that once arrived he is there to stay awhile. For is he not the superior sex and therefore of staying qualities?

"With women, on the other hand, still unequal, still denied, reaching the top, prima donnahood brings along with the triumphs a thousand female fears that today's supremacy may give way to tomorrow's downfall. Therefore she is irritable, therefore she is whimsical, therefore, while the sun shines and she sits upon her throne of music, she is going to make all the fuss she can so the world will be sure she does indeed sit on the throne where she can make the fuss. The element of inferiority and of the cheap cut-up comes in again, you see. However, I must finish where I began—that women singers sing better for license and that, therefore, they should be allowed all the license they need—to sing with."

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