

Drama Be Damned! **An Appreciation of Eva Tanguay**

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Eva Tanguay! It is the name which echoed in the Universe when the Sons of the Morning sang together and shouted for joy, and the stars cried aloud in their courses! I have no words to hymn her glory, nay, not if I were Shelley and Swinburne and myself in one — I must write of her in cold prose, for any art of mine would be but a challenge; I rather make myself passive and still, that her divine radiance may be free to illumine the theme. Voco! per nomen nefandum voco. Te voco! Eva veni!

Eva Tanguay is the soul of America at its most desperate eagle-flight. Her spirit is tense and quivering, like the violin of Paganini in its agony, or like an arrow of Artemis — it is my soul that she hath pierced!

The American Genius is unlike all others. The "cultured" artist, in this country, is always a mediocrity. Longfellow, Bryant, Emerson, Washington Irving, Hawthorne, a thousand others, all prove that thesis. Michael Monahan may prove the rule, too, as its single exception. The Genius is invariably a man without general culture. It seems to stifle him. The true American is, above all things, FREE; with all the advantages and disadvantages that that implies. His genius is a soul lonely, desolate, reaching to perfection in some unguessed direction. It is the Fourth-Dimensional Component of force. It always jars upon the people whose culture is broad and balanced and rooted in history. Consider Poe, with his half-dozen thorns of genius; only in the short story has he a rival — and that, most exquisitely, in his own line; I speak of that bard-like spirit, beautiful and swift, that love in desolation masked, Alexander

Harvey. Consider Whitman, transcendental and bestial, without Form and Void even as Earth in her First Age. Consider George Gray Bernard, how supremely "impossible" is his perception of Truth! His Lincoln is like "what the Cat brought in," as his critics say; but (by the Great Horn Spoon!) it is Lincoln. (Yes!) Lincoln himself was a genius of the same order, if one may say "order" precisely where it defies classification, a climax of development on lines utterly unsuspected, and out of harmony with the general or obvious trend of Evolution. Arthur B. Davies has something of the same abnormality; he is of no school; he sees without being shown how to see. This American quality has exponents whose virtue extends to every branch of thought. Play over Morphy's games of chess! He beat his opponents by playing in a style which was entirely foreign to all accepted ideas. Even on subsequent analysis, his soul remains inscrutable. Steinitz, again, invented a gambit whose fundamental principle, the exposure of the King at the beginning of the game so that he may be well placed at its end, was simply "unthinkable." Sam Loyd, too, in his Chess Problems, found how to make his Key-move "unlikely"; not unlikely to the conventional mind, so that one could find it by simply excluding the likely, but truly and absolutely unlikely, without reference to any antecedent knowledge. In all these — and many their brethren — is this one quality, utterly sacred and occult, of unsophistication, of originality, of purity.

Eva Tanguay is the perfect American artist. She is alone. She is the Unknown Goddess. She is ineffably, infinitely, sublime; she is starchy chaste in her colossal corruption. In Europe men obtain excitement through Venus, and prevent Venus from freezing by invoking Bacchus and Ceres, as the poet bids. But in America sex-excitement has been analyzed; we recognize it to be merely a particular case of a general proposition, and we proceed to find our pleasure in the wreck of the nervous system as a whole, instead of a mere section of it. The

daily rush of New York resembles the effect of Cocaine; it is a universal stimulation, resulting in a premature general collapse; and Eva Tanguay is the perfect artistic expression of this. She is Manhattan, most loved, most hated, of all cities, whose soul is a Delirium beyond Time and Space. Wine? Brandy? Absinthe? Bah! such mother-milk is for the babes of effete Europe; we know better. Drunkenness is a silly partial exaltation, feeble device of most empirical psychology; it cannot compare with the adult, the transcendental delights of pure madness. (I suppose I ought to couch these remarks in the tone of an indictment; but though the literary spirit is willing, the fountain pen is weak.) Why titillate one poor nerve? why not excite all together? Leave sentiment to Teutons, passion and romance to Latins, spirituality to Slavs; for us is cloudless, definite, physiological pleasure!

There is something diabolically fine in this attitude. The old conception of Satan is fluffily theological and other-worldly; as a devil he is stupid, and as a seducer petty and vulgar; the American idea of him as the logical and philosophical negation of the health of the whole being is a thousand ages ahead of the other. We have measured him, as we have measured the lightning, and analyzed him as we have analyzed God. Infernal Joy! Eva Tanguay is — exactly and scientifically — this Soul of America. She steps upon the stage, and I come into formal consciousness of myself in accurate detail as the world vanishes. She absorbs me, not romantically, like a vampire, but definitely, like an anaesthetic, soul, mind, body, with her first gesture. She is not dressed voluptuously, as others dress; she is like the hashish dream of a hermit who is possessed of the devil. She cannot sing, as others sing; or dance, as others dance. She simply keeps on vibrating, both limbs and vocal chords, without rhythm, tone, melody or purpose. She has the quality of Eternity; she is metaphysical motion. She eliminates repose. She has my nerves, sympathetically irritated, on

a razor- edge which is neither pleasure nor pain, but sublime and immedicable stimulation. I feel as if I were poisoned by strychnine, so far as my body goes; I jerk, I writhe, I twist, I find no ease; and I know absolutely that no ease is possible. For my mind, I am like one who has taken an overdose of morphine and, having absorbed the drug in a wakeful mood, cannot sleep, although utterly tired out. And for my soul? Oh! Oh! — Oh! “Satan prends pitié de ma longue misère!” Other women conform to the general curve of Nature, to the law of stimulation followed by exhaustion; and by recuperation after rest. Not so she, the supreme abomination of Ecstasy! She is perpetual irritation without possibility of satisfaction, an Avatar of sexinsomnia. Solitude of the Soul, the Worm that dieth not; ah, me! She is the Vulture of Prometheus, and she is the Music of Mitylene. She is the one perfect Artist in this way of Ineffable Grace which is Damnation. Marie Lloyd in England, Yvette Guilbert in France, are her sisters in art: but they both promise Rest in the end. The rest of Marie Lloyd is sleep, and that of Yvette Guilbert death; but the lovers of Eva Tanguay may neither sleep nor die. I could kill myself at this moment for the wild love of her — (Love? It is Poison! I say the love of her) — that sets my soul ablaze with fire of hell, and my nerves shrieking; at my left hand is my eighth Absinthe, and at my right a nearby empty ounce bottle of cocaine; I am using this combination of drugs as sedative, not as stimulant. She is the one woman whom I would marry — oh sacrament and asymptote of blasphemy! There is a woman of the Ukraine, expert in Mystic Vice, coming to destroy me body and soul, in an hour’s time; to make of me a new Mazeppa. But I know that she will not absolve me nor assuage me. I shall still writhe in the flames of my passion for America — for Eva Tanguay.

Eva Tanguay! Eva Tanguay! Eva Tanguay! l’ane en feu d’un poète damné t’invoque! Oh! Oh! si seulement je pourrais mourir! Tu ne le veux pas; je le sais.

Bien! — comme tu veux! — j'agonise! achève ton hor-
reur — qui ne s'achève point! — Eva! — catin sublime!
— fais donc! — Ah! — Ah! — Ah!