

CLARA BOW

The Psychologist Thought:
 "What is There to Analyze?"
 But he Discovered that the
 Screen's Storm Center is a
 Fascinating Contradiction

WHEN I was first asked to make a psychoanalytic portrait of the irrepressible Clara Bow, I thought: What is there to analyze? I could hand her a permanent card marked 'Miss America Plus,' or 'Youth of the World XXth Century,' or, and entirely by way of compliment, 'Clara Bozo.' Vitality, optimism, a big dash of sensationalism, a quick play of changing emotions, an outdoor above-board quality, a good sport and pal, a beauty that is feminine in its softness but charged with a disturbing energy—she seems the very embodiment of modern American youth of the feminine variety. She is a go-getter, she puts herself across with a bang; everybody likes her; some young men go mad about her; she is a natural little boss; she is blessed with common sense; she is easy-going and an excellent mixer.

"We have her number," the great audience thinks. Who doesn't personally know someone like Clara Bow, a little American storm-center, making things fly, pepping up parties, leading on adventures, the old gun-shooting hell-raising pioneer blood coming up to punish a cocktail or go lickety-split in a car in the dark, terrifying her male companion? If women have the upper hand in this nation—and some people think so—we could rename the country Bow-land, an apt description of a passing moment.

And yet such is the variability of human nature, that in the description above, I have only scratched the surface of Clara Bow's character. She has favored SCREENLAND with answers to a questionnaire, and here are some of the things she says about herself:

- I am extremely self-conscious.
- I am very shy.
- I feel that I am misunderstood by most people.
- I hate to be conspicuous in public.
- I sometimes sulk.
- I sometimes go by moods, prolonged for hours, even for days.
- I like to be alone a good part of the time.
- I am considered deep by others.
- I am somewhat jealous.
- I am easily in a tense condition.
- I have a feeling of inferiority before others.

There is a fascinating contradiction here: a bold go-getter who is shy; a young woman who is a good mixer, a hale-fellow well-met, yet who is self-conscious and feels inferior; an easy-going beauty who is tense; a good sport to whom life is not a game but something serious and even



Clara the extravert: vitality, optimism, a big dash of sensationalism, a good sport and pal, in one small package.

harsh; someone liked by all, yet who feels misunderstood by most. In short, someone who puts herself down as 33 parts an introvert: that is, someone ill-adapted to the world, a dreamer rather than a doer, an inferiority feeling person; to 42 parts an extravert, one who is well-adapted, naturally active, and naturally successful. The numbers run close together: 9 parts more extraverted than introverted; that is, a complicated character whose nature pulls back just a little less than it strides forward; a fear that causes a crouching back and then a blazing leap toward its object; an inner conflict between don't do and do, between failure and conquest, between fear and courage.

Some time ago—too long ago to remember well—I read the autobiography of Clara Bow. It was sad, even though it was interesting reading. The trouble with autobiography is that we see ourselves through a mist of personal emotions, and the painter who knows how to make a likeness of himself is a rare one. Clara wept on her own shoulder, or the reader's and described her life as a tragic one, from the cradle on. She knew poverty, shabby clothes, and the sneers of her playfellows in Brooklyn; she knew disappointments in her struggle to rise from a non-entity to a world-famed star. It read like the life of Eleanore Duse, Sarah Bernhardt or Joan of Arc. Clara said she laughed so that she wouldn't cry, she jazzed to keep from sinking

Psycho-Analyzed

By
James
Oppenheim



Clara the introvert: a complicated character whose nature pulls back just a little less than it strides forward.

shadow that lay over her childhood. For a girl to be sneered at by her fellows, to have to wear shabby clothes often enough causes the inferiority complex, the feeling of being little, naked and no good, and hence tends to make the person somewhat introverted—withdrawing a bit from life, shy, hating unpleasant publicity, somewhat self-conscious. But this feeling of inferiority sometimes awakens a counter-feeling of extreme intensity. Just as fear and the feeling of helplessness often send a man into a rage, bringing up even an abnormal courage, so the feeling of inferiority sometimes brings up an 'I'll show them all yet' feeling, a burning ambition, a dream of changing shabbiness for splendor, of rising from a non-entity to a world-fame.

This is why the contradictions in Clara Bow's nature have brought her to the top, even the feeling of inferiority, of being unable to do it, bringing up powerful resources, reckless courage, an ability to overcome great odds, a laughter conquering tears. Or to put it technically, one with somewhat of the introvert in her who extraverts even more daringly and actively than the normal extravert. That is why I called her Miss America—Plus. The Plus comes from that vaulting ambition, that never-say-die recklessness.

Besides that, if I were to place Miss Bow as a type, I should say that she is, like most women, mainly guided by feeling, feeling being the leading function, but sensation running a close second. She is not only charming, delightful, sociable, quick in her judgments, all due to her developed feeling, but she has played sensation heavily, the sensuous element, the love of the spectacular, the itch to get a kick out of everything, the love of change and danger. Feeling is more quiet, as witness, say, the nature of Mary Pickford. Sensation uses the loudspeaker and puts on a wow of an act. It was by depending largely on sensation that Clara Bow put herself across, and kept overcoming her fears and feeling of inferiority. But her recent development has been in the growth and maturing of her feeling and the evidence of more intuition.

If she can go on taking the "Dangerous Curves" as well as she did it in the picture, she will cease being merely Miss America, the Girl with IT, the reckless and beautiful sensationalist, she will become a rarely good actress, of unusual artistic power, with depth and understanding, winning a deeper affection in the public's heart. But she will always be Clara Bow, the spirit of youth; in a sense the American spirit which hardly knows how to spend all its overflowing

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down in despair.

The facts didn't agree with this self-portrait. I saw the Irrepressible One in half a dozen pictures and I'm sure Clara couldn't fool the camera all of the time, nor the public either. She simply sizzled with an energy that swept all before it. Her laughter rang true. That delightful and even dazzling streak of toughness in her was racy, of the earth and of the times.

But I had the experience, just the other day, of seeing (and hearing) "Dangerous Curves." Then I saw that there was more in Clara Bow than we had thought before. She has developed remarkably, even in the space of a year: she is more truly an actress, she reveals a greater depth of character. She has all of the old bounce, impulsiveness and laughing energy; the blood of jazz runs in her veins; but she has revealed a fund of deep and moving tenderness, a passion that is strong and devastating, a new subtlety of action that is convincing. She was content in a good part of the show, of which she is the star, to remain a little in the shadows while the Kleig lights glared on Richard Arlen. The strain of self-sacrifice that ran through the part was more than a pose.

We may take it for granted then that Miss Bow's answers to the questionnaire were sincere, whether wholly accurate or not, and that they connect with the dark

Could You Pass Talkie Test?

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photographic test only. If she photographs in a satisfactory manner, she is turned over to Miss Alice Kelly, dramatic voice instructor, who asks her to read passages from a book or play—anything suitable.

"If the applicant has a good voice and expression and survives this test, she is then asked to appear in a scene with one or more experienced actors. The scene is generally from some play and this time 300 feet of film are shot. The applicant is never required to make an individual test.

"This hurdle having been successfully negotiated, the applicant is then made up, costumed by Sophie Wachner, fashion creator, and supervisor of ladies' wardrobe and asked to play a character in a scene on an actual set. The best of equipment and 100 per cent facilities are employed in this test.

"The film is then cut and submitted to Mr. Winfield Sheehan, vice-president, and Mr. Sol Wurtzel, general superintendent of Fox-Movietone for their approval or disapproval.

"So much for the dramatic test.

"In the case of a test for a singing voice, the procedure already detailed is followed up to a certain point. The applicant is required to practise one or two songs. After they have been sung and it is decided that the test is O. K., the applicant is asked to return to the studio two days later to sing the same songs with DeSylva, Brown and Henderson, the composers, or Dave Stamper, another composer, present to pass judgment.

"In the event of a dancing test, the same routine is followed only Seymour Felix or Edward Royce, well-known stage directors, are on hand to give their verdict as to the result of the test.

"The casting office, of course, selects all experienced actors, but they, too, go through tests in costume before they are finally assigned to a production.

"We take, on an average, 20 tests a day. Some days we do not discover a single new person who can pass it. I might point out the fact that more than 300,000 feet of film were used up in a recent test in Italy and the result was one successful applicant, while in Mexico City, not long ago, two possibilities were discovered in 30,000 feet of film.

"Being the Columbus of new faces and voices has its thrills, however, as Winfield Sheehan will tell you if a shrewd enough reporter will get him to talk about Janet Gaynor."

But discovering talent or genius is one thing and recognizing it on the screen, well, that's another story—of the eyes and ears of the public.

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energy, which flings up skyscrapers taller and taller, not just for a good investment, but for the bravado and adventure of it, which passed a prohibition law just in order to make drinking an obstacle race, something a little more exciting than merely imbibing liquor.

All that we ask of Clara Bow is that she keep on being more and more herself and growing up along with the rest of us!

"LOOK..... he's imitating a pianist!"

.....someone shouted
Then a queer thing happened

JACK had strummed some "blues" for us on his juke and Nan had just finished her screamingly funny burlesque on the "Kinkajou." We were all set for dancing when—the radio refused to work!

No amount of jiggling brought it to life, either. All we could get from that confounded radio were such desolate howls that the girls begged us to leave it alone.

Someone made a half-hearted suggestion of bridge. But Tom had a better plan. Pulling Joe to his feet—good old "sit-in-the-corner" Joe, whom everyone liked to pick on—he cried in a loud voice:

"Just a minute, folks! The party is saved! Joe, here, has kindly offered to enliven the proceedings with a piano solo."

This promised to be good—for, as we all knew, Joe couldn't play a note. Naturally we expected him to clown.

Just as he sat down at the piano, Tom called out:

"Play 'The Varsity Drag'—that's a hot dance number!"

Excited whispers came from all parts of the room. "Wonder what he's going to do!"—"He doesn't know one note from another!" Suddenly someone shouted:

"Get this! Look—he's imitating a pianist!"

A A Queer Thing Happens

Raising his hand melodramatically, Joe waited a moment to command silence. Then, to the complete amazement of us all he struck the first bars of—"The Varsity Drag!"

And how! With all the verve and expression of a professional! No wonder Tom's eyes almost popped out of his head! This wasn't the clowning he had expected Joe to do!

Unable to resist the tantalizing music, couple after couple glided around the floor. When Joe stopped playing, the applause could have been heard around the block.

All evening they kept Joe busy at the piano—playing jazz, popular songs, sentimental ballads, even classical stuff—everything the crowd asked for!

How that lad could play! I was dumbfounded. Joe had always seemed to be a "born wallflower"—he had never displayed any talent for entertaining—yet now

I determined to solve the puzzle. On the way home that night I drew Joe aside and demanded:

"How on earth did you do it?"



He laughed.

"Why, it was easy! I simply took that home-study course in music your cousin told us about. There wasn't any expensive private teacher to pay—and since the lessons came by mail, I didn't have to set aside valuable hours for study.

In fact, I practiced only in my spare time, a few minutes a day. And the course is thorough! Before I knew it, I was playing simple pieces *by note*, and

"I guess you don't have to tell me how thorough it is," I broke in.

"Your performance tonight was a knockout! And you used to say you had no 'talent!'"

"I haven't," he insisted. "Anybody can learn to play the U. S. School of Music way!"

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