

GATEWAY TO THE MODERN



RESITUATING J. M. BARRIE

Edited by Valentina Bold & Andrew Nash

SCOTTISH LITERATURE INTERNATIONAL

Gateway to the Modern: Resituating J. M. Barrie

Edited by
VALENTINA BOLD
and ANDREW NASH

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Abbreviations

References to Barrie's main works, given parenthetically in the text, are to the following editions:

- ALI *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888), Uniform Edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930).
- DE *The Plays of J. M. Barrie in one volume*, ed. A. E. Wilson ['The Definitive Edition'], (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1942).
- EE *An Edinburgh Eleven* (1889), Uniform Edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926).
- FMJL *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (1932), in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A J. M. Barrie Omnibus*, ed. Andrew Nash (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001).
- GH *The Greenwood Hat, Being a Memoir of James Anon: 1885–1887* (London: Peter Davies, 1937).
- LWB *The Little White Bird* (1902), in *Farewell Miss Julie Logan: A J. M. Barrie Omnibus*, ed. Andrew Nash (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001).
- MO *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896), Uniform Edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931).
- PP *Peter Pan* (1904), *Peter Pan and other plays*, ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- PPKG *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens; Peter and Wendy*, ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- PW *Peter and Wendy* (1911), in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens; Peter and Wendy*, ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- ST *Sentimental Tommy* (1896), Uniform Edition (London: Cassell, [1930]).
- TG *Tommy and Grizel* (1900), Uniform Edition (London: Cassell, [1928]).
- WT *A Window in Thrums* (1889), Uniform Edition (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928).

Introduction

VALENTINA BOLD and ANDREW NASH

J. M. Barrie is a writer of elusive depth and complexity, whose life and literary creations continue to inspire writers, readers and theatre-goers worldwide. In 2010, the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth was celebrated with events around the world, from library exhibitions and theatrical performances to a Google doodle. The inspiration for this volume came from an academic conference held that year in the town of Dumfries, where Barrie attended the local academy from 1873 until 1878, later recalling these years as the happiest of his life. Augmented by additional new work, the result is the very first collection of academic essays on Barrie which attempts to do at least some justice to the extraordinary range of his literary achievement.

Barrie's fluctuating critical fortunes have been well documented. The spectacular fall from grace that set in soon after his death has prompted its own analysis of why a writer so esteemed by his own generation could be so harshly criticised by the next and, sadly, still overly neglected today.¹ As with his near contemporary Robert Louis Stevenson, biographical studies of Barrie continue to outweigh critical assessments. The revival of interest in Barrie's writing and in new performances of his plays which has taken place over the last thirty years is a sign that his work is being taken more seriously by critics, historians and practitioners of the theatre (if not necessarily the novel), as well as scholars of children's literature and Scottish literature. Nevertheless, a recently published *Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880–2005* gives his work only one passing reference (to *Peter Pan*), while a companion to *fin de siècle* literature does not mention him at all.² Distressingly, a modern essay collection on his most famous creation categorically asserts that 'J. M. Barrie's critical reputation rests on one work: *Peter Pan*'.³

This volume sets out to challenge that claim by considering the remarkable variety of Barrie's writing against its many literary and cultural contexts. The range of Barrie's achievement has perhaps counted against his critical

reputation: a novelist once considered the equal of Meredith and Hardy; the most successful dramatist of the early twentieth century; the creator of a children's classic that has refused to grow old; not to mention underestimated contributions as an essayist and humorist; the multiplicity of genres within which Barrie worked has perhaps prevented him from being taken to the centre of critical discussions in any one area of literary criticism or history. His originality as a writer has also been a problem. Contemporary reviewers of both the novels and plays were often reduced to describing them as 'Barrie-ish', 'Barrie-esque' or 'all Barrieness'.⁴ In her *Modern Drama in Europe* (1920), Storm Jameson concluded: 'his work eludes definition, as does the work of all men who are masters of their art. There is nothing like it in the whole of modern drama.'⁵ Originality can be an obstacle, however, when it comes to placing an author in defining categories or traditions. Is Barrie predominantly a novelist or a playwright? Is he Victorian, Decadent, Edwardian or Modernist? The title of this collection – *Gateway to the Modern* – acknowledges the difficulty of answering these questions but attempts to embrace it in a more positive and productive light that has hitherto been the case. What emerges is a writer fully immersed in the literary and intellectual culture of his day. In his *Critical History of English Literature* published in 1960, David Daiches judged that Barrie 'was quite out of touch with the new literary movements of his time'.⁶ The essays in this volume mount a detailed and compelling challenge to that assessment, exploring the many ways in which his way can be illuminated when read alongside various literary, cultural, theatrical, and philosophical contexts of the period.

The book is divided into three sections. The first considers Barrie's achievement as a dramatist, and explores how his mastery of the theatre made him an early enthusiast for, and proponent of, the cinema. Jan McDonald discusses Barrie's relationship with his theatrical contemporaries, notably Shaw, Galsworthy and Harry Granville Barker. She traces his involvement in theatrical controversies, such as Ibsenism and the stage portrayal of the New Woman and the suffragette, and campaigns, including the fight against censorship and the movement for the establishment of a repertory theatre. Barrie emerges from this detailed analysis as a writer whose theatrical vision contrasted with the 'essentially optimistic world view' of his contemporaries, and whose originality lies in the 'pervasive performative element' of his work, which 'links with his use of

metatheatricality as a vessel for his commentary on current theatrical practice.’ This point is picked up directly by Anna Farkas, who discusses Barrie’s metatheatrical critique of the Victorian dramatic tradition in plays produced between 1900 and 1915. As Farkas reminds us, it was Shaw who judged that Barrie’s plays had confirmed ‘the final relegation of the Nineteenth Century London theatre to the dust-bin’. Her chapter shows convincingly that in plays such as *The Wedding Guest* (1900) and the much neglected *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire* (1905), Barrie’s playful deconstruction of the sexual problem play swept aside established theatrical forms and ‘prepared the stage for a new type of heroine and a different kind of play about gender relations.’

Farkas is ultimately concerned with establishing Barrie’s ‘modernity as a playwright’, a task also pursued by R. D. S. Jack in his chapter on the later drama. Building on work in his most recent book on Barrie, *Myths and the Mythmaker* (2010), which considers the author’s early development, Jack extends his reach to consider the mature dramas, from *Quality Street* (1902) to *Dear Brutus* (1920). Drawing on Barrie’s undergraduate lecture notes, particularly those from Professor David Masson’s classes on ‘Rhetoric and Belles Lettres’, Jack proposes an alternative model for reading Barrie’s ‘Shakespearean’ romances, one alert to the range of modal variety that Barrie inherited and ‘modernised’ from Masson’s classes and his published Shakespeare lectures. Such an approach, as Jack persuasively demonstrates, presents Barrie as a ‘unique modernist’, whose multi-layered texts and embrace of open endings serve as ‘accurate mirrors of a doubtful age.’

The final chapter in this first section demonstrates how Barrie’s modernity, and his interest in the potentiality of form, extended to early cinema. Jonathan Murray considers Barrie’s reciprocal relationship with the new medium, discussing his own satirical – yet serious – contributions to the genre written and produced during the First World War, and also examining the many ways in which his life and work has proved irresistible to other filmmakers, including Alfred Hitchcock. Murray shows how Barrie’s enthusiastic engagement with the infant medium of cinema manifested itself in ‘satirical culture-clash comedies that pre-empted postmodernism’s subsequent interest in the self-referential aspects of artistic and popular cultural production.’ More recently, cinematic representations of Barrie’s work have taken the form of transformations of *Peter Pan* and interpretations of the

author's biography. Murray concludes his chapter by critically examining the distortions and simplifications of these reworkings of text and life.

The essays in the second section concentrate mainly on Barrie's prose, and are concerned with the complex matter of his place in literary tradition, particularly traditions in Scottish literature. Douglas Gifford offers a detailed analysis of Barrie's final prose work, the novella *Farewell Miss Julie Logan*, placing it in the context of his fiction as a whole and alongside other Scottish narratives of the supernatural, from Burns to Buchan. Uncovering striking continuities in form, theme, setting and language, Gifford shows how Barrie's story connects with a rich heritage of Scottish writing dealing ambivalently with the supernatural and embodying forms of narrative duality. Whereas Gifford looks back to identify the cultural roots of Barrie's fictional flowering, Andrew Nash looks forward to consider the presence of his work in modern and contemporary literature. Rehabilitating the notion of the sentimental as one of Barrie's appealing strengths rather than a weakness, Nash convincingly traces Barrie's connections with, and influence on, modernist novelists, such as D. H. Lawrence and Ford Madox Ford, and a range of modern Scottish writers including James Kelman, Alasdair Gray, Muriel Spark and John Burnside. The discussion of Spark throws open the door for more detailed comparison of their work, with the possibility of viewing *Memento Mori*, for instance, as a creative response to *Peter Pan* read as a revenant ballad.

Much of the responsibility for the prevailing view that Barrie is tangential to major developments in Scottish literature belongs to Hugh MacDiarmid. In her chapter, Margery Palmer McCulloch reconsiders the relationship between these two writers, exploring some of the reasons behind MacDiarmid's hostility to a writer whom he considered in 1926 to have 'long severed any effective connection he ever had with Scottish life or thought'.⁷ Rightly judging the two writers to belong to separate generations, McCulloch nevertheless shows that MacDiarmid's attitude to Barrie was perhaps not as negative as is commonly assumed, and that both shared something in common in their recognition of the artistic possibilities of the Scots language.

The final section, 'Peter Pan's Connections', explores neglected aspects of the background and intellectual contexts of this iconic play, and also shows its direct effects on audiences. Paul Fox explores *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, identifying a liminality within the work as it brings together precise

topography, imaginative reconstruction (temporal as well as physical), elements of performance and the Decadent aesthetic, exemplified by a key section in John Davidson's 'Thirty Bob a Week'. Rosemary Ashton complements this with a demonstration of the importance of a real place – Bloomsbury, the home of the Darling family – for the play version of the text. Ashton traces the significance of Bloomsbury to Barrie, both personal and literary, building up a much clearer picture of the literary London in which he moved and worked, an under-researched aspect of his biography and writing career. In a different vein, Ralph Jessop examines some of the philosophical ideas that underlie *Peter Pan*. Focusing on the notion of make-believe and transformation, Jessop presents the play as a profoundly modernist text, utilising oppositional discourses (scepticism – grounded in Barrie's Scottish philosophical education and, specifically, in the work of David Masson and Thomas Carlyle – versus wonderment; independence of thought and adventure versus utilitarian beliefs) to construct escapist possibilities. Valentina Bold returns us from make-believe to the real (at least in part), considering a set of letters written by children to the first Wendy, Hilda Trevelyan. Bold demonstrates the impact of the play on its first, and youngest, audiences, several of whom went on to have distinguished and adventurous lives, but also reveals their complex, multiple response to Wendy as a fictional character and Trevelyan as actress.

J. M. Barrie and the story of *Peter Pan* have most recently inspired the planning for a Children's Centre for Literature in Dumfries. The centre will be based at the conserved house and garden at Moat Brae in Dumfries, where Barrie played out as a boy the games that would later inspire the story of *Peter Pan*. The *Peter Pan* Moat Brae Trust is now at an advanced stage of planning for the centre, which will not only celebrate the Barrie and *Peter Pan* heritage, but more generally seek to promote a better understanding and interpretation of Scotland's literary and cultural heritage for children and young people. This will be done through a year-round programme of activities, events, workshops and exhibitions. A unique attraction at the centre will be the reinvention of the garden, inspired by Neverland, and laid out to entice children into a world of imagination, discovery and outdoor play. The final chapter of this volume, introduced by Hugh McMillan and related to Dumfries Academy's children's collection *On the Grass Cloud: Poems for the Peter Pan Garden*, which he edited, shows that the play still

has relevance for children, perhaps especially those who, as Barrie did, have lived in Dumfries.

It is the editors' hope that this volume will assist in Barrie's ongoing literary re-evaluation. By presenting him as an inherently modern writer, we want to show that his work, often dismissed in the later twentieth and early twenty-first century, provides a true 'gateway to the modern', which is at once original, consciously intellectual, and emotionally engaging.

Notes

- 1 For an incisive investigation of this problem, see R. D. S. Jack, *Myths and the Mythmaker: A Literary Account of J. M. Barrie's Formative Years* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2010), chapter 1.
- 2 Mary Luckhurst (ed.), *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama, 1880–2005* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); Gail Marshall (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 3 Donna R. White and C. Anita Tarr (eds), *J. M. Barrie's Peter Pan In and Out of Time: A Children's Classic at 100* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), p. vii.
- 4 See Leonee Ormond, *J. M. Barrie* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 149; review of *The Little White Bird*, *Times Literary Supplement* (14 November 1902), p. 339.
- 5 Storm Jameson, *Modern Drama in Europe* (London: Collins, 1920), p. 211.
- 6 David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature* (1960), rev. edn, 2 vols (London: Mandarin, 1960), II, p. 1108.
- 7 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (1926), ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. 17.

PART I: DRAMA AND FILM

1. Barrie and the New Dramatists

JAN McDONALD

Introduction

William Archer in *The Old Drama and the New* described Barrie as ‘a writer so intensely individual as to elude classification and stand absolutely alone in our dramatic literature.’¹ J. C. Trewin failed to find accommodation for him in ‘the great house’ that was *The Edwardian Theatre*, ‘uneasy in the drawing room, hardly for the study, not entirely for the playroom, he refuses to be categorised.’² There is likewise uncertainty about whether he belonged in the commercial world of London’s West End stage or in the revolutionary New Drama movement whose principal promoters were William Archer, G. B. Shaw, Harley Granville Barker, and John Galsworthy. Sheldon Chaney, writing in 1914, places Barrie firmly within the latter group: ‘the new English school of dramatists, including Shaw, Galsworthy and Barrie, is by every test the greatest in achievement and the greatest in promise in the dramatic world today.’³ Thomas Dickinson disagrees: ‘in a time in which revolt had become something of a convention, Barrie has been distinguished by standing apart from the protestants [...] Barrie is no reformer, no joiner of new groups.’⁴ Jean Chothia settles for compromise: Barrie ‘stands between the Society dramatists and the writers of minority drama whose themes he often absorbed into lighter, less testing plotting and characterisation.’⁵

Initially it might appear that Barrie and the ‘protestants’ had little in common. Advocates of radical revision of both current theatrical conventions and the conservative consumerist ideology that the bourgeois drama promoted, the reformers sought to establish an ‘alternative’ theatre, independent of commercial considerations. The long run system, based on a profit-making imperative, which they believed inhibited both creative opportunities for actors and the development of emergent playwrights, should be replaced by a repertory system with matinees devoted to experimental new work; the engagement of fashionable ‘stars’ by an ensemble company of equals with equal remuneration, and the reactionary ethos of Society drama by a repertoire that promoted ‘a critical and dissenting attitude

to conventional codes of morality.⁶ The New Drama, nurtured in the *ad hoc* productions of the private theatre societies of the 1890s, briefly found a home at the Court Theatre (1904–07) and at the Savoy (1907–08) under the management of Granville Barker and J. E. Vedrenne.

The major part of Barrie's theatrical activity was conducted on the West End commercial stage or its New York equivalent. Many of his works ran for many months and were regularly revived. He was associated from the outset of his playwriting career with successful theatre managers. The leading roles in his dramas were played by 'star' performers or 'stars' were created by appearing therein. His plays, and his principal producer, Charles Frohman, called for elaborate innovative settings, the houseboat in *Walker, London* (1892) and the island in *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), being only two examples. He did not as a rule address current social or political issues overtly, as Shaw and Galsworthy often did, and as Barker did from time to time. Yet Barrie regularly engaged with the theatrical radicals and their campaigns. This chapter will examine: first, the personal relationships between Barrie, Shaw, Galsworthy and Barker; second, the manner in which the playwrights contributed to the theatrical controversies of the period; and, finally, some critical opinions of Barrie's plays expressed by the New Dramatists.

Friends and Neighbours

Despite differences in their political philosophy, in their dramaturgy and in the theatrical spheres in which they operated, Barrie, Shaw, Barker and Galsworthy were friends, and for many years close neighbours. It was Barker who suggested that Barrie move into Adelphi Terrace House where the Barkers and Galsworthys resided. Shaw lived opposite, 'so near that the tale went (quite untruly) that [they] could throw things into each other's windows'.⁷ Letters and anecdotes reveal many social visits, communal sheltering from air raids during the First World War, shared lunches and dinners, often at their favourite restaurant, Romano's. The moral support provided by Barker on the occasion of Barrie's divorce was reciprocated during the harrowing period prior to final separation of Barker and Lillah McCarthy in 1918.

Barrie was probably closest to Galsworthy. Both began their literary careers as novelists – Galsworthy's *Fraternity* (1909) was dedicated to Barrie

– and each was skilful at adapting his private persona to meet social demands. On meeting Galsworthy, Barrie described him thus in a letter to the Duchess of Sutherland: ‘a queer fish like the rest of us. So sincerely weighed down by the out-of-jointness of things socially [...] but outwardly a man-about-town, so neat, so correct – he would go to the stake for his opinions, but he would go courteously raising his hat.’⁸ Galsworthy regularly consulted Barrie on drafts of his plays, and appointed him his representative at rehearsals for the production of *The Forest* in 1924. Barrie, as Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh (from 1930), was instrumental in the awarding of Honorary Degrees to Barker and Galsworthy.

On Shaw’s relationship with Barrie, Dennis Mackail wrote: ‘Secretly these two might never fully appreciate each other’s gifts, and neither perhaps was unduly anxious to laugh at each other’s wit – Barrie most certainly not; but there was appreciation for all that.’⁹ In his obituary of Barrie in the *Sunday Graphic*, Shaw called him ‘a most affectionate creature’. Although ‘shy’ and ‘even secretive’, ‘when you did meet him he was charming’. ‘You couldn’t help liking Barrie, and you couldn’t help liking his work.’¹⁰

A light hearted collaboration occurred in 1914 when Barrie, Barker, and Shaw, together with William Archer and G. K. Chesterton, participated in the creation of a bizarre escapade. Barrie wanted to include a piece of filmed material in the piece he was writing for Gaby Deslys, *Rosy Rapture* (1915), and this involved the cream of London’s *literati* in an excursion to the country where they performed a spoof Western movie with a script created by Barrie under the direction of Barker.¹¹

Controversies and Campaigns

Ibsen and Ibsenism

Granville Barker asserted that Ibsen’s work ‘is and must be imitated by almost every dramatist coming after him. Like Ibsen or loathe him, our European drama is Ibsenised.’¹² The first translations of Ibsen’s plays to be shown on the London stage belonged to that group of his work known as ‘social prose dramas’, namely, *A Doll’s House* in 1889, followed by *Pillars of Society*, *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, and *Hedda Gabler* in 1891. Each examines the ways in which events of the past ‘haunt’ contemporary life and how heredity and environment combine to shape a character’s destiny. All have a woman in a leading role, a woman who finds herself at odds with conventional

social values and common assumptions about gender identity. Conservative critics expressed outrage at what they saw as sociological tracts advocating disruption of the *status quo*, focussing on sordid tales of neurotic, unstable women and the deviant behaviour of degenerate men.

In 1891, the Ibsen controversy was at its height with six productions of his plays in London, including the notorious private production of the unlicensed *Ghosts* by the Independent Theatre Society in March, prompting William Archer's article 'Ghosts and Gibberings' in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which ridiculed the complacent narrow-mindedness of the critics and the London establishment.¹³ 1891 also saw the production of Barrie's satire, *Ibsen's Ghost*,¹⁴ and the publication of Shaw's essay, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* – two contrasting responses from two dramatists, each at the outset of his theatrical career.¹⁵

Had Barrie been seeking to win favour with the leaders of the nascent alternative theatre movement, the fact that his first successful professional production was a burlesque on the work of its prophet and progenitor would hardly have been diplomatic. Even the timing of its opening performance might be seen as a direct challenge. *Ibsen's Ghost*, starring the popular comic actor, J. L. Toole, was presented at his Theatre on 30 May, the afternoon before the last night of *Hedda Gabler*, produced by Elizabeth Robins, one of Shaw's 'high priestesses of Ibsen', and supported by William Archer, Ibsen's champion and pioneer of the New Drama. Barrie's play proved a box office 'hit' and continued in the repertoire until the end of the season.

However, the question arises as to how much of this success can be attributed to Barrie. He wrote the script, but Toole, whose name appeared in the subtitle, 'Toole Up-to-Date', was the 'author' of the production. Barrie's original was altered by cutting large sections of dialogue, by adding improvised 'gagging' or 'thickening', as Toole called it, by introducing the actor's own 'spoof' of a popular mime play, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, and, most significantly, a piece of comic business in which he 'transformed' himself into Ibsen. According to the reviewer in the *Era* this transformation was the highlight of the production. 'If anything will extinguish the Ibsen craze, it will be the apparition of Ibsen at Toole's, and the uproarious fun accompanying it.' In performance, Barrie's parody of Ibsen's plays became a vehicle for Toole's idiosyncratic brand of comedy. William Archer noted in his review in the *World*: 'as yet, indeed, we have only seen the "business" of Mr

Toole's part. I intend to return in a week or so, in hopes of hearing the dialogue.¹⁶

Clement Scott, the arch-anti-Ibsenite, was delighted. 'I don't suppose that Mr. J. M. Barrie thinks seriously about the subject one way or another. I did and I do. But some of us have shouted it out in court; he has laughed it out.'¹⁷ In fact, the production did little to offend the Ibsenites, despite Barrie's later hinting that his 'soap-bubble was meant to fall upon [Ibsen's] more weird idolators' rather than on Ibsen himself.¹⁸ William Archer in his review had generously called it 'A piece of genuinely witty fooling which ought not to be missed'. Later in life, Barrie was to acknowledge Ibsen as 'the greatest craftsman that ever wrote'¹⁹ and 'the dramatist I have always known to be the greatest of his age.'²⁰

Shaw's *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, originally delivered as a lecture to the Fabian Society as part of a series entitled 'Socialism and Literature', interpreted Ibsen's plays as indictments against the tyranny of social conventions that destroyed the identity of the individual. Written for a radical audience, it omitted any reference to Ibsen's poetic language, his use of symbolism, and his innovations in theatrical technique. Ibsen always denied that he was a social philosopher and resented his plays being treated as propaganda rather than as dramatic art, but Shaw's *Quintessence* had considerable influence on his reception in Britain. 'Ibsenism' came to mean three things; a belief in a socialist political philosophy; a resistance to unthinking adherence to social convention; and a belief in creating a new role for women in society. The New Dramatists, radicals both politically and theatrically, were likewise committed to writing plays with a serious social purpose, in some cases with an overt agenda of social reform. Although Shaw's assessment of Ibsen is flawed, it remains instructive in examining the works of Shaw himself and of his fellow playwrights.

Shaw's 'butchering of Ibsen to make a Fabian holiday' and the sacrifice of Barrie's satirical critique to the self-promotion of a star may contribute little to an understanding of Ibsen's work *per se*, but Barrie and the radicals continued to comment on the contemporary theatre, albeit employing differing critical methods. Archer and Shaw were adept at using their journalistic reviews to challenge theatrical conventions. They, together with Barker, wrote monographs and scholarly essays.²¹ Only Barker wrote a play *about* the theatre, his elegiac *Farewell to the Theatre* (1916).

Barrie, on the other hand, frequently chose the theatrical form itself to expose the limitations of contemporary drama and theatre practice. *Alice-Sit-By-The-Fire* (1905) satirises the inherent artificiality and false presumptions of the ‘well made play’ and the conventions of Society drama on the well-worn theme of ‘women with a past’. William Archer, writing in the *World*, commenting that the play is ‘an effective piece of dramatic criticism’, goes on: ‘It is like a commentary-in-action upon my article of last week; but it will do more [...] to render impossible the play of artificial situation and mendacious self-sacrifice.’²² *A Slice of Life* (1910), Barrie’s burlesque of the ‘problem play’, was described by the *Times* reviewer (2 July 1910) as ‘a masterpiece of most delicate and searching dramatic criticism’. In *Rosy Rapture*, the revue sketch Barrie wrote for the glamorous Gaby Deslys, he highlights ‘the silliness of “musical comedy” with its incompetent chorus [and] the grotesqueness of melodrama.’²³ *Punch: A Toy Tragedy* (1906) brings together the ‘old’ drama and the ‘new’ as the dated and unfashionable marionettes have to give way to ‘Superpunch’ or the ‘New Man’ in the guise of none other than G. B. S. himself.²⁴ When Shaw’s *Press Cuttings* (1909) was refused a licence because living characters were presented on stage, he protested that he himself had been thus represented ‘by no less well-known an author than [his] friend Mr J. M. Barrie.’²⁵ Barrie claimed that ‘Superpunch’ was not designed to resemble Shaw but Granville Barker playing John Tanner in *Man and Superman* at the Court Theatre in 1905, whose make-up rendered him a Shavian ‘look-alike’. Barrie’s metatheatrical critical commentaries, although less sustained than those of Shaw, Archer or Barker, share much in substance.

The ‘Woman’ Question

There was a growing demand for reform of gender inequality in Britain from the 1880s until the outbreak of the First World War. The theatre was harnessed to promote the campaign for women’s suffrage, from the sketches of the Actresses’ Franchise League to the full length propagandist drama, *Votes for Women!*, by Elizabeth Robins, directed by Barker at the Court in 1907. More generally, a reassessment of the nature of women, sexual relationships between men and women, and the political and social rights of women were pervasive themes in the plays of the New Dramatists. Notable examples include Shaw’s *Mrs Warren’s Profession* (1894), *Man and Superman* (1902), *Getting Married* (1908), and *Pygmalion* (1913). Barker in *The Madras*

House (1910) observed the sorry plight of working women, 'superfluous' single women, women as objects of the male gaze, and idle middle-class 'ladies', a comprehensive catalogue of wasted opportunity and sexual discrimination. Galsworthy exposed the plight of women confronted by prejudice and economic hardship, for example, Mrs Jones in *The Silver Box* (1906), the strikers' wives in *Strife* (1909), and Ruth Honeywill in *Justice* (1910).

In Barrie's dramas there are many representations of strong women, indeed even 'heroic' women, who have a powerful influence on the action.²⁶ However, in the context of the 'Woman' Question his position is somewhat ambiguous. In asserting that women *already* have power over public institutions, such as politics and the law, but a power that is exerted in the domestic sphere and channelled through the covert manipulation of a male agent, Barrie shows himself to be fundamentally a reactionary.

'Plain' Maggie Wylie, the heroine of *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), is virtually 'sold' in matrimony by her brothers to the impecunious student, John Shand. Through the application of her intelligence and energy 'behind the scenes', he becomes a successful politician, only latterly coming to realise her essential contribution to his rise to power. The women's movement was not impressed by the view that a woman's effective impact on society and on public life could/should be exerted only indirectly through a male relative. A review of the play's revival at the Old Vic in 1960 makes the point: 'it was to a large extent, in its 1908 meaning, a betrayal of women. Its arguments were those of the anti-suffragette.'²⁷ Indeed, the play's title was copied for the title of a Scottish anti-suffrage pamphlet.²⁸

In the second act, Barrie introduces (significantly, set partly offstage) a group of suffragettes. John is to make a speech in support of their cause, secretly written, of course, by Maggie. This short scene at first sight has little significance for the plot, but Barrie's reply when it was suggested that it be cut from the published text, is revealing:

The suffrage must stand, for though there is so little of it, it is an integral part of the play. It only 'dates' the play to the extent of showing the action takes place a few years ago and I think it should give opportunities for the society-ladies to wear dresses that will be more interesting than absolute present-day – probably those long tight skirts (of which I see myself making some play).²⁹

Is this scene ‘an integral part of the play’ because it is an ironic comment on the fact that, while the radical women believe they need the support of a man in their cause, it is a ‘womanly’ woman, Maggie, who has actually written the key speech? Or was it simply that Barrie just wanted to introduce stage business with the ‘long tight skirts’? One must agree with Barker’s comments, unsurprising from the author of *The Madras House*, ‘the political part is trivially dealt with’.

A manipulative woman of a different kind appears in *The Adored One* or *The Legend of Leonora* (1913), the only play by Barrie ever to be booed by an audience. The first act, later *Seven Women* (1913), succinctly made the point that the female character is multifaceted and flexible in assuming a variety of roles, including those of the Mother, the Suffragette, the Murderess, and so on. In the subsequent act, Leonora (interestingly the full name of Ibsen’s Nora in *A Doll’s House*) murders a man in a railway carriage because he will not shut the window to accommodate her ailing child. At her trial, playing the ‘sacred’ role of mother and of the ‘womanly’ woman, she charms the judge and jury and is acquitted. The failure of this version led Barrie to revise the script so that the murder and the trial take place in a dream.

The diversity of the critical reception of this drama is revealing. A large proportion of the press regarded it as an anti-suffrage play. The reviewer in the *Illustrated London News* proposed that it might be ‘a parable on the lawlessness of Militant Suffragism and its immunity from punishment’.³⁰ Channing Pollock in the *Green Room Book* called it ‘the greatest, and gentlest, anti-woman suffrage play ever written’.³¹ Others dismissed it as a failed attempt at a *pro-suffrage* play. Walbrook in *Barrie and the Theatre* grieved that ‘the Feminist wave had caught [Barrie] in its clasp and temporarily washed away his sense of humour’.³² The *Times* (4 September 1913) quoted the author: ‘[Barrie] said he was trying to show that a new spirit had grown up among women but he is mistaken if he thinks that modern women would agree that their future lies with wayward, inconsequential feeble-minded creatures of the type portrayed in Leonora’. R. D. S Jack argues that such critics failed to appreciate the irony of the outcome. ‘[Leonora] has shown how women may conquer male society while still entrapped in its institutions’.³³ In other words, Leonora and Maggie Wylie are manipulative sisters under the skin.

Richard Burton in his review of the 1918 edition of Barrie's plays concludes: 'In his treatment of women he is the great champion of the old-fashioned woman of charm and truly feminine influence. As Shaw gave us the New Woman, so Barrie the woman who has no date, because she stands for the Eternal Feminine.'³⁴ But Shaw similarly portrayed Candida Morell, Jennifer Dudgeon, Lady Cicely Waynflete, and that 'boa constrictor', Ann Whitefield – all guilty of manipulation of an unsuspecting male for their own ends. The reviewer of *The Adored One* in the *Era* noted the similarities.³⁵ Shaw and Barrie 'the two great discoverers of the modern woman' unite in their celebration of 'the triumph of femininity'. 'It is this very woman that rules the world. For her man will put aside all laws, will perjure himself, will count himself blessed to be allowed to die for her.' The difference is that while Barrie tolerates, even indulges, these 'embodiments of femininity', Shaw's heroines are, to a greater or lesser extent, delineated as knowingly 'monstrous' by their creator. Unwittingly, perhaps, the American actor, Hilda Spong, hits the mark: 'I find Barrie's women are women I have always known, and I find Shaw's cleverer than most women.'³⁶ However, Barrie proved that, in the right context, Frohman's Repertory Season, he was able to produce a play about a New Woman that satisfied the critics and met the principles of the New Drama movement, *The Twelve-Pound Look* (1910).

*The Campaign for a Repertory Theatre*³⁷

After the financial failure of the Barker/Vedrenne management at the Savoy Theatre in 1908, progress towards the achievement of the repertory ideal was foundering. Barker wrote to Gilbert Murray: 'All our lot of dramatists are slacking off in production because they can't be sure of anything but matinee audiences. Repertory is our salvation.'³⁸

Barrie had shown an interest in the repertory idea, when he became a member of the Council of the Incorporated Stage Society in 1904, whose remit included a commitment to establish a Repertory Theatre in London. In his Lecture to the Playgoers' Club in the same year, he expressed 'a passionate belief in a repertory theatre', and if one such existed he 'would send the plays he should write in future to it'.³⁹ In 1909, he approached Charles Frohman, his friend and long term producer, suggesting that he mount a repertory season at his London base, the Duke of York's Theatre. Edward Garnett, citing Archer, Shaw, Barrie, Granville Barker