

J.M.BARRIE ECHOES OF THE WAR

I apologise in advance because, if I do my job right today, you may go away a little disappointed. I'm tasked with talking about five plays and of course the thing with plays is that they are best experienced live. But all you've got is me, so I'll try to give you value for money nevertheless.

If you are like most people, whose knowledge of Barrie extends no further than Peter Pan, I hope you're in for an eye opening experience.

We are about to go a long way from *'to die will be an awfully great adventure.'*

Starting with a very brief introduction to Barrie and then moving on to the plays themselves.

In the 1890s American theatrical producer Charles Frohman began championing Barrie's plays. Already a well known writer of short stories and novels, Barrie's playwriting career took off in 1892 with *Walker, London;* notable also as the production where he met his wife, actress Mary Ansell. They married in 1894 but divorced, childless in 1909.

Frohman took a chance on *Peter Pan* when no one else would touch it. Sadly, he was killed with the sinking of the Lusitania in May 1915.

After Frohman's death Barrie wrote:

I had only one quarrel with him, but it lasted all the sixteen years I knew him. He wanted me to be a playwright and I wanted to be a novelist. All those years I fought him on that. He always won, but not because of his doggedness; only because he was so lovable that one had to do as he wanted. He also threatened, if I stopped, to reproduce the old plays and print my name in large electric letters over the entrance of the theatre.'

Barrie's approach to the theatre was always very 'hands on.' He would re-write constantly and the idea of a definitive version of a Barrie play is an anathema. He embraced the fragile ephemerality of the theatrical experience but this does not mean that his plays themselves are trivial or ephemeral in theme and content.

Even before the war, in Barrie's plays from *What Every Woman Knows* to *The Twelve Pound Look* we can find an incredible range and depth.

The 'Echoes' plays themselves deal with familiar Barrie themes; social class, regret, fantasy versus reality and the challenging of established norms.

(Scholar Jenna Kubly writes) Barrie staged the war in a manner that neither sentimentalized nor sanitized it, yet despite his darker themes of disillusion and unchangeable destiny, he also portrayed wartime Britain with a humor and charm that enabled audiences to enjoy his plays. It is only with the benefit

of distance and hindsight that one is fully able to appreciate the truthfulness, and yet compassion, with which Barrie portrayed the Great War.'

'Echoes of the War' was first published in 1918, comprising *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals*, *The New Word*, *Barbara's Wedding* and *A Well Remembered Voice*.

When we read them, we do indeed read echoes. Barrie is deliberately a slippery, elusive character and we do well to remember that he is as adept at playing with his reader as he is playing to his audience.

When the First World War broke out, Barrie was in London for the dress rehearsal of a revival of *The Little Minister* and was called upon as part of a government plan to organise writers for the literary dissemination of the British point of view. In other words, Barrie, alongside authors such as Hardy, Galsworthy, H.G.Wells and Arnold Bennett were tasked to write war propaganda.

Barrie's trip to the States, early in the war raised speculation even in his own day. Suggestions were that he was spearheading an attempt to get America to join in the war. But it was an abortive mission because America confirmed neutrality while Barrie was on the boat. Perhaps to save face (not just his own) Barrie told the media his visit was a private one. He did the rounds of plays on Broadway and caught up with Frohman, soon himself to become a war casualty.

Clearly J.M.B was never going to be a spy or ambassador for the British war efforts. But was he an effective propagandist?

While some of his contemporaries tried, and failed, to write propagandistic fare (and some didn't try at all), Barrie's first war play *Der Tag* opened just before Christmas 1914. It is not included in the 'Echoes' collection, but is important to the context.

His biographer Mackail notes that even at the time people were confused by it.

The Times Literary Supplement critic wrote 'the popularity of *Der Tag* will be greatest in the study.'

And sadly, it's in the study that all Barrie's War plays have largely remained.

The Context of the Plays

At the start of the First World War, there was a debate over whether theatre should actually continue. Those against, suggested it was too trivial or perhaps a waste of resources; while those for it understood both the propaganda potential as well as the need for entertainment for those on the home front.

At the time, theatre was one of the most popular forms of entertainment, and when the war began there was an upsurge in attendance. With the scarcity of supplies and luxury items, entertainment was one of the few places people could spend their surplus income. Both working and middle class audiences attended the theatre. And Barrie could appeal to both.

However, with the exception of the musical revue, *Rosy Rapture* (1915) Barrie's work did not appear in the music halls and cinemas at this time. It generally played in West End Theatres. His audiences were generally the middle and upper classes, the cost of a seat in the West End being usually at least double that of the music hall or cinema.

In 1916 an Amusement Tax was brought in which added a surcharge to ticket prices. Despite this, and the fears of Zeppelin raids, a contemporary noted that there were more people in search of entertainment during the war than there were theatres to accommodate them.

Yet, while generally playing for middle class audiences, Barrie's subject matter in the 'Echoes' plays looks at the war from the perspective of all classes.

There was a sense in which everyone was 'invested' in the war, it was a personal thing which touched every family - and Barrie exploited this to explore class related issues.

Barrie himself was already immensely rich before the war and he was incredibly philanthropic during it. He continually gave, and helped raise money for the war effort. He supported many hospitals and other causes in the UK and abroad. Today we are well aware of his generosity to Great Ormond Street Hospital. Indeed I suggest, it is largely because of the GOSH legacy, and the commercialisation of *Peter Pan* that it has come to eclipse almost all his other work, putting his other extensive philanthropic and creative work into the shadows.

But we should bear in mind that despite *Peter Pan's* on-going popular success, it is just one string in Barrie's virtuoso bow.

Barrie was one of the few recognised playwrights who continued to write new works throughout the First World War. His war plays are important not least because they represent one of the few extensive collections of plays in English, written during WWI, that attempt to capture the changing mood of Britain during these crucial years.

They underscore the recurring themes of sacrifice, patriotism, anti-German sentiment, and the breakdown of class structure in relation to the war.

A contemporary reviewer noted: *'It is not an easy thing to write a play for wartime audiences. Before the war for instance, Bernard Shaw could amuse [...] But with the advent of national service and active patriotism, his comic recipe fails. On the other hand, Sir James Barrie [...] so emphatically succeeds that the public cries for more.'*

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In the 'Echoes' plays Barrie presents a narrative of wartime Britain. Whereas generally the theatricals of the day tended to be melodramas or hastily written patriotic works, as an acknowledged master of the one act play, Barrie goes much further.

Historian and critic Christopher Innes wrote:

'In Barrie's hands the one act play could explore a single situation, emotion or character in depth, exploiting the close focus.'

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In the years surrounding the war, there was a period of flux in social class. Placing Barrie's writing into that context is vital if we are to understand it.

In pre-war plays such as *Admirable Crichton*, *Quality Street*, *What Every Woman Knows* Barrie subtly engages with class politics. The 'Echoes' plays have a similar element.

Two of them are 'of' the middle class, (*The New Word* and *A Well Remembered Voice*), while *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* is of the working class and *Barbara's Wedding* of the gentry/aristocracy.

This was a time when middle class people kept servants, when women didn't have the vote. Socialism was 'new' and Communism and Fascism didn't exist in any practical sense. There *is* politics and social commentary in Barrie's work and while his plays offer up a view of times past in his own day they represented a challenging view of contemporary society. Above all we find a truthful and keen observation of the people caught up in the war.

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Now, let me turn to the plays.

The pre 'Echoes' play *Der Tag*, from December 1914, feels like watching a car crash in slow motion. There is a sense of helpless inevitability which perhaps connects us across the centuries. With Brexit looming it has a particular 'echo' for today.

Der Tag or 'The Day' was the toast of the German army and navy, and the titles represents the pervasive gung ho spirit of both Germany and Britain at the start of the war.

Patriotism has many faces and Barrie was being experimental. Perhaps he shot wide for his contemporary audience when he tried to rouse Britain by showing her current perceived (and actual) failings. It is something of a blunt tool. But for those of us appreciating it in 'the study' the play is insightful. Even in this slight piece we can fathom depths, if we are brave enough to accept the challenge.

The play opens with the German Emperor and his Chancellor in dialogue. The Emperor is about to sign a document which will make Germany at war with France and Russia. Convinced that Britain will not join as enemy, and once they've got rid of France and Russia they can move in on Britain, they describe Britain as a spent power.

So Barrie's Emperor's speech is designed to wind the British up into a fervour of patriotism. He says:

Britain has grown dull and sluggish... Britain's part in the world's making is done. "I was," her epitaph.

This perhaps was not the message the British wanted to hear in December 1914. Or indeed today!

The play reveals the dark side of imperialism as the Emperor is confronted by the character of Culture, seen here as both feminist and internationalist. She chides him:

Culture spreads not by way of maiming freedom. I'll not have you say you fight for me. Find some other reason.

Using Culture as a character is like pitting a Greek Chorus up against a Shakespearean hero. It's classic Barrie – a supposedly simple play is underscored by something much more complex. As the play progresses, one can see echoes of *Hamlet and Henry V*. Barrie knows his Shakespeare. But he is also Barrie. He has a toolbox all his own. And he's not afraid to use it.

Written while there was still a hope that the war would be over by Christmas, *Der Tag* shows the Emperor as a man whose fate is settled by powers greater than himself. Barrie doesn't suggest answers, but uses Culture as a conscience, revealing it as one of the first casualties of war. Committing to war by dreaming of peace, The Emperor cannot make up his mind which will make him greater.

As a piece of propaganda *Der Tag* may seem strange, even bizarre. It speaks to us from 'before' and offers a warning for what may be to come.

Today I find its relevance is beyond comfort.

THE NEW WORD

Opened on the variety stage on 22nd March 1915 as a curtain raiser to Barrie's popular work *Rosy Rapture the Pride of the Chorus*.

Initially it had mixed reviews - described as '*a touching little picture of an inarticulate abashed father and son bidding each other good-bye before the boy left for the Front.*'

And '*merely a trifle but "iridescent with smiles and tears. It is being enacted with variations, not only in 'any English home,' but one might almost say, in every English home."*

Yet when it was later staged in New York as part of a triple bill with *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* and *Old Friends*, as part of the war relief effort, it was seen as true to life in terms of characterization and plot.

The play looks at the lives of one family (The Torrances) as a means of addressing the universal theme of familial relationships during war. The Torrence family are a solid middle class one and the play at first appears to be a piece of pro-war propaganda.

Opening with the question- how long is the war going to last? almost as soon as the question is framed, the play shifts focus.

Set while national pride was still strong, the characters display anti-German sentiment throughout. However, for characters and audience alike, the cracks are beginning to show.

The play challenges the 'nobility' of the cause and by looking closely at the sacrifice of families, asks how far one should and can trust the Government.

At this point the slaughter fields of Ypres, Verdun and the Somme were still to come but there is a palpable sense of fear for that future. Barrie's hallmark of exploring dark depths under superficial lightness is employed to great effect.

We see Barrie already turning the screw, belying the pro-war propaganda and questioning naive patriotism with the revelation that the family have already lost one son, in childhood. Yet still they are prepared to sacrifice their living son for a just cause.

What to us is simply The Great War or The First World War, was a fundamentally new type of war and in 1915 people were still coming to terms with what this actually meant. Previous wars had been fought either by the aristocracy, in a tradition dating back to the medieval feudal system, or by soldiers from abroad. In the 19th century colonial wars for example, Indian regiments comprised almost four-fifths of the British force in India.

This 'new' War was one in which the common man could fight. In 1915 the brutal reality of trench warfare was still largely seen as a fiction from the perspective of the domestic front. Thus while Roger's parents purportedly understand that the sacrifice might be that of *their* own son, there is still a sense of romanticism, expressed by sister and mother. In the practical details of her packing for his journey, we sense a mother acting as if she is sending her son off to boarding school. It was all glory... the guts came later with the War Poets.

Barrie is clever in his conceit of 'new' words. Ostensibly the play is concerned with the 'new' word *Second Lieutenant*, but there is another more hidden 'new' word: *Dear*, which is offered in the context of the relationship of father and son.

No family was untouched by the war. Barrie's own adopted sons George and Peter Llewellyn Davis had become Second Lieutenants in 1914 and Jack served in the Royal Navy. George's departure for the Western Front in December 1914 probably provided the creative spark for *The New Word*. In a cruel twist of fate, George himself was killed on March 15th days before the play's opening.

The New Word is set at the time when Lord Kitchener was calling up troops and thousands of men from every walk of life flocked to enlist. They couldn't all be officers. But they wouldn't all want to be privates. Those from the likes of Eton and Cambridge were therefore commissioned as second lieutenants when they enlisted. These are men who would not necessarily have gone into the army as a career.

The 'new' word 'Second lieutenant' replaced subaltern for this 'new' war. As a rank it created a middle ground position between the traditional aristocratic officers and the common soldiers.

Barrie forces us to look into the very nature of words. In the inability of (especially) father and son (but also husband and wife) to express love we sense that Barrie understands the opposition he constructs.

Mrs Torrance often misunderstands her husband, taking his humorous teasing for sarcasm. Sarcasm is defined as using words to express the opposite of what they mean - and throughout this play Barrie shows how inadequately his characters *can* use words - especially to express emotion.

When Mrs Torrance leaves the men alone, the play subtly shifts to consider the relationship between father and son. At this point we are introduced to the plays second, hidden 'new' word: 'Dear.'

It becomes apparent that while both men have respect for each other, they are unable to express affection, Barrie uses fragmented conversation to illustrate this sense of the emotional minefield.

Here the word *Dear* is not just a 'new' word, rather, Barrie places a whole new concept under scrutiny by employing the language of war in the context of everyday speech.

The war has forced Mr Torrance to come to terms with his own age and status. He feels emasculated by sending his son to war in his place. Note that where the mother was prepared to sacrifice her living son, gaining an elevated sense of status, the father feels that he should be offering himself as a sacrifice.

Father and son navigate their way, with poignant humour, through the difficulty of their relationship. They are both ostensibly keen to placate Mrs Torrance – both agreeing that the mother is the most important person in their family relationship.

They protect her using coded language which, given her misinterpretation of humour as sarcasm, they know she will not understand.

But we the audience can see all the levels of language at play. We are witness to the depth and the significance of the father/son relationship, which we will see revisited as a variation in *A Well Remembered Voice*.

The play on words, and the playing with words this drama contains, offers an insight into the depths Barrie could plumb even in supposedly light, popular drama. As the first real 'Echo' this play stands on the cusp of an inevitable and painful reality that the 'new' war was about to become even harder and even more personal for Barrie (and many others). By finally saying the 'new word,' Roger brings a sense of completion to his relationship with Mr. Torrance. We can only speculate whether the same was the case for Barrie and George.

THE OLD LADY SHOWS HER MEDALS

The Old Lady Shows Her Medals premiered on April 7th 1917 in a triple bill that included another Barrie play; *Seven Women*, and *Wurzel-Flummery*, by A. A. Milne. Originally written to be staged by amateur groups to raise money for the war relief effort to support war casualties and their families, it went on to be one of Barrie's most often performed and revived works and ran for sixty eight performances.

Written and performed after the Somme campaign, everything about it is different from the spirit and understanding of *The New Word*. Quite unusually for the time it features the working classes. Barrie was well known for writing plays about social class and manners, but here he is doing something different - showing the working class perspective.

While the opportunity to look into the private lives of their 'servants' would doubtless be intriguing to his contemporary audience, one wonders what Barrie's middle class audiences really made of it.

The premise of the play is based on a lie, which initially gives the audience the comfortable position of moral high ground. While Barrie begins by lampooning his characters; by the end of the play he has changed our minds. That's his trademark of course. He both appropriates and manipulates the concept of 'victim'.

Barrie's staging of the play in a basement room is typically clever. Looking down into the basement room from the street equates to looking down in social class. It's subtle, but telling humour.

Less subtle is the introduction to the central character, Mrs Dowey. An unusual heroine, Barrie pokes fun at her in the initial stage directions, fully aware of the picture he is portraying. It seems the play will be about catching her out in her lie. But his goal is to challenge expectations of the audience and of class in general.

The hapless Mrs Dowey feels socially disadvantaged because she doesn't have a son. So she creates one - a kind of fictional adoption - from the pages of the newspapers. However, she is almost caught out when her so called 'son' turns up on her doorstep.

From the ludicrous beginning we are quickly drawn to a kind of sympathy, if not empathy with Mrs Dowey.

The war brought out a sense that 'we're all in it together' which in some way united the disparate classes. Her overarching desire is the need for personal involvement. This is reflected in the opening exchange between the four women who have gathered for tea in the basement flat of Mrs. Dowey where the importance of social standing even within the lower ranks is highlighted.

While her companions are unaware, we know Mrs Dowey's dark secret. At a time when status is conferred by one's relationship to someone at the Front, the 'old lady', has no son, while the other women have something to boast about. Barrie works on us so that even as we know we should not condone her behaviour, we find ourselves feeling sorry for her.

After the other women have left, she explains her deceitful actions to her new found 'son': *'It was everybody's war, mister, except mine. I wanted it to be my war too. [...] It didn't affect me. It affected everybody but me. The neighbours looked down on me. Even the posters, on the walls, of the woman saying, "Go, my boy," leered at me. I sometimes cried by myself in the dark.'*

From an introduction based on mockery, a love bond develops between Kenneth and his 'mother.' Through the developing relationship between mother and son, Barrie deftly explores the idea that one's true family is a family of choice rather than birth.

While the central part of the play is the relationship between Mrs Dowey and her 'son' Kenneth, the role of the other women should not be underestimated. Talking about what life will be like after the war, they are most concerned about how their status will be affected. It appears they care less about 'victory' over the Germans and more about how their own domestic standing will change.

When written and performed in 1917 the war seemed far from over and we see ordinary people, just getting by, day by day. From the *new world* they had achieved a new normality. And it was bleak.

The play's epilogue sees a piper plays 'The Flowers of the Forest' (the song of the Black Watch) which suggests to us that Kenneth has died.

Ironically, that means Mrs Dowey is no longer a fraud, but placed in the honest position of grieving for a lost loved one. She has a medal and memories.

A contemporary critic wrote: *'It is, like all Barrie's plays, like the story of everyman life, a tragi-comedy. The early scenes arouse inextinguishable laughter; in the last act, the ordinary relation of audience to stage is reversed. Instead of noise on the stage and silence in the auditorium, the solitary woman moved about in absolute stillness while unrestrained sobbing is heard all over the house. The heroine is a charwoman, elevated to a vertiginous height by solemn pride.'*

The play was also performed successfully in America in 1917 and given revivals after the war, though many considered it a piece 'of its time.' It was made into a movie in the 1930s and revived on television both in the 50s and 60s. We might see it as a primitive precursor of kitchen sink drama And it certainly gives Pinter a run for his money.

A WELL REMEMBERED VOICE

Had just one matinee performance, on 28 June 1918, as part of a charity fundraiser for Lady Lytton's Hospital. It has rarely been performed since. The J.M.Barrie Lit Soc did a reading of it for our birthday celebrations in May this year, which enabled me to fulfil a personal long time ambition of hearing it read out loud. Because, after all, plays are meant to be heard and seen, not just read. And this play has haunted me for many years.

We might think of *A Well Remembered Voice* and *The New Word* as a pair of curtains which, being drawn together, offer a picture of the impact of war on 'ordinary' middle class families. While *The New Word* foreshadows the death of the Second Lieutenant Roger Torrance, *A Well-Remembered Voice* deals with the effect of the death of Second Lieutenant Dick Don on his family.

A central image of this play is 'the veil' between life and death, which Barrie explores in all its awful fragility, offering an insight into war beyond the fighting and beyond the grave, thereby exposing a sense of the futility and the loss.

The play opens in the darkness of Mr Don's painting studio, as his wife gathers friends for a séance. The darkness suggests both the grief that the Don family suffers and their inability to let go of the dead.

Spiritualism was governed by the supposition that the dead cannot depart until they have returned to comfort the living. It became particularly appropriate in the context of the war. Having placed their future hopes in the generation of soldiers who had fought the war and had died, the bereaved felt adrift. A responsibility had been imposed on the dead many people sought to reconnect with the dead in order to receive the permission to go on living through spiritualism.

It was a particular (and we may think peculiar) way to grieve. Most notably of Barrie's own friends and contemporaries, Arthur Conan Doyle became obsessively spiritualist. The impact of war grief was also seen on others: Rudyard Kipling's poem 'My Boy Jack' shows how haunted he was by his loss.

Mrs. Don longs to communicate with her son Dick, killed five months previously. Her chosen medium is the séance, during which, as 'his' words are tortuously spelled out, she jumps to the wrong conclusion as easily as Mrs Torrance before her - convinced that the words F - A being tapped out are a sign that Mr Don's lack of belief is the barrier to her communication with her son. That the meaning of the spelled out letters has to be 'guessed' is symbolically telling.

Communication, or lack of it, is central to the play. While in the earlier play we deal in broken words, here we sense that communication itself has in some sense become broken or fractured.

Words still play a part in both parents grief but we sense a disconnect as each seeks a vicarious way to hold on to their relationship with their dead son.

As Mrs Don leaves her husband with a parting comment:

In a sense you may be glad that you don't miss him in the way I do

The power of words to hurt unintentionally is shown all too starkly. The distance between husband and wife is revealed as the distance of grief. The concept of 'unspeakable' words now has an even greater poignancy here than in *The New Word*.

As with the earlier play, the relationship most deeply explored is that between father and son. Lost in his grief, Mr Don longs to communicate. He cannot storm the emotional trench with his son as Mr Torrance did because now we are dealing with communication beyond the grave. He holds on to his son only through a version of denial afforded by his agnosticism. Finding no comfort in séances he spends his time reading about death in the papers – a vicarious mode of grieving and a way of validating his loss.

The play's central image, 'the veil' is not fully explored until Mr Don is alone at which point his emotions take control and he cries. It is this action which triggers the 'Well Remembered Voice.'

The deceased Dick Don appears. Mr Don's first reaction is to get his wife. His son stops him, pointing out that he can only come to one, and that he has chosen his father.

Dick's basic message is that he wants his family to be cheerful. We might see this as the play seeking to offer comfort, suggesting that people best respect the dead by living to the full. However, the great strength of this play, for me, lies in the duality of message and purpose.

As the two men reminisce about the past Barrie shows father and son talking at cross purposes, exposing the fragility of communication.

The light-hearted manner would make us forget the enormity of the situation if we did not remember that Dick is a 'ghost' or 'spirit'. This of course is a powerful stage image where the corporeality of Dick is juxtaposed against his status as 'ghost.'

As the play progresses, Barrie seems to offer a way to move on, but the enormity of how to achieve this in the real world still eludes the characters (and perhaps Barrie himself). I suggest what we see most clearly here is evidence that no one is able to comprehend the nature of their own grief (including Barrie.)

Whereas at the beginning of the war the sense was of 'the new' in all its aspects, by the end of the war both a generation and a way of life have been

lost. Those who set off to war as an adventure have now endured the horrors of the trenches. The play illustrates this transformation.

Yet we laugh, almost despite ourselves as Barrie wraps his pathos in light humour.

Dick says of his death:

'Haven't you got over it yet, father? I got over it so long ago. I wish you people would understand what a little thing it is.'

But we still find it hard to reconcile his position.

Dick talks about the veil that hangs between the living and the dead, reminding us that the soldiers on the Front exist precariously from moment to moment in a state between living and dying. He says:

'When I came to, the veil was so thin that I couldn't see at all; and my first thought was, Which side of it have I come out on? The living ones lying on the ground were asking that about themselves, too. There we all were, all sitting up and asking whether we were alive or dead; and some were one, and some were the other. Sort of fluke, you know.'

By 1917, when this play was performed, the gung-ho, anti-German sentiment of the early days has long gone, exposing a more realistic understanding of the cost of war.

Suggesting that it takes the dead to explain to the living that the concept of 'the enemy' in terms of real people is unimportant, *A Well Remembered Voice* also hints that the dead cannot go happily to their reward until the families let go and stop grieving. This message is doubtless well intentioned, but suggests grief is tied up with guilt and we feel Barrie himself grapple with this double edged sword of 'letting go'.

At the end, Barrie has Mr Don ask his son the most difficult of questions.

"Would you rather be—here—than there?"

It is the question perhaps we all want answered but dare not ask.

I will not spoil things by giving you Dick's answer, simply say that as he fades from sight, Mr. Don is left alone again to consider everything his son has told him.

As audience we are left to draw our own conclusions – the play is open ended. While some have seen a hope embedded in the ending, others (myself included) see 'brightness' as dimmed and despair as foremost.

Ironically *A Well Remembered Voice* is perhaps one of Barrie's least remembered plays. As an 'echo' of the past it rings out in the dark with a painful, truthful honesty. While emotional exchanges of words between living men may still be seen as an embarrassment, Barrie uses words, and the images they create on stage, to devastating effect and we suspect great personal cost.

I wonder if the play is overlooked because we are still uncomfortably unable to cope with the exploration of personal grief it contains. If so, that is a shame because it is a brave play, unbearably poignant and importantly 'real.' Shining light into dark places is painful but sometimes necessary.

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BARBARA'S WEDDING

Finally I turn to *Barbara's Wedding*, the most unusual of all the 'Echoes' Plays. It deliberately juxtaposes realism with fantasy in a way that can be quite confusing to the unwary. Often what is real and what is a figment of the imagination is hard to discern. Its theme is perhaps the effect of war on memory.

Written in 1918, it was published in August of that year but not produced on stage until a decade later. It has remained a 'problem' play since. The 1917 play *Dear Brutus*, written during but not about the war, can help with an understanding of it. Studying both yields some interesting perspectives. There is some interplay between the 'dreams' of the Colonel in *Barbara's Wedding* and Lob in *Dear Brutus*.

Existing in the realms of remembrance and memory, *Barbara's Wedding* can also be seen as a tragic indictment of the illusions that perpetuated the Great War. In this respect it perhaps has more in common with *Der Tag* than the other 'Echoes' Plays.

Sweeping in its arc, *Barbara's Wedding* takes itself out of domestic realism and concerns itself with the realm of the mind and memory. Indeed we might see this is less a play about the war and more about the consequences of war on the mind.

Yet the Great War is woven into the fabric of the play in subtle ways. In its own way, it perhaps deals with the echoes before they actually came. Certainly it offers a very interesting insight into memory (and possibly dementia) and explores a different perspective on the individual experience of war. As such it is darker and there is less of Barrie's trademark humour.

Treatment of time in the play is complex. Juxtaposed between three time frames it serves to expose the fantasy within the 'realism' of the actions of The Colonel. Many of the characters only exist in the mind of the Colonel and if the play is taken too literally it will seem to fail. Reading it can lead to confusion. It is a play which really requires staging to come into its full intentionality.

Set in a large house, the play deal with the perspective of the aristocracy rather than the working or middle classes of the other Echoes plays. From the vantage point of 1917, The Colonel (so called because he had served as a Colonel in the Crimean War) looks both to the past and to the future. He is a

man literally 'out of his time.' Like Mr Torrance in *The New Word* he has to realise that this war is not 'his.'

Written late into the war, the play is significant for its awareness of all that has changed including, but not exclusively, the breaking down of class barriers. Post war, men like the Colonel (failing memories or not) find a world quite different to that they inhabited in 1914. His fleeting understanding provides much of the pathos of the play.

For all the nostalgia towards the past, Barrie exposes a new reality, which is perhaps too great for The Colonel to understand. His fractured mind represents the breaking of society from the pre-war reality and an inability to adjust to a new reality. Those around him try to protect him, but the only protection is in fantasy.

This is quite a bleak play, as indeed one might expect written so late in the war. We sense that for the Colonel, for Barrie and many others, the loss of life was an almost impossible price to pay for the purported promise of a better world.

Words were broken in the other 'echoes' plays. Here the mind itself is fractured. The play's significance on a psychological level, as a play to do with the fragility and complexity of mind and memory cannot be underestimated. As an exploration of how the individual psyche deals with trauma it is both challenging and insightful.

Illusion and reality are central to the play, the changed positions of 'real' to 'unreal' throughout support this exploration. It is uncomfortable, perhaps because it demonstrates the inability of man to fully deal with the horrors of war as reality - and as those of us for whom The Great War can only be viewed through Echoes, this is a significant point to remember.

Barrie scholar Kubly notes: '*Barrie recognized that his final vision of the war was tragic both in its condemnation of the illusions that had created a culture capable of the Great War and its acknowledgment of a post-war culture that was unable to come to terms with its own disenchantment.*'

We might indeed see this experimental play as Barrie's own elegy to the Great War. Life, and death, went on.

Finally, while many people remember Barrie solely for the pre-war *Peter Pan*, if we follow him beyond the echoes, as far as his Rectorial address at St Andrews in 1922, given on the theme of Courage, I believe we do him more justice.

Here he looks back and says to the students of the post war generation saying:

'send a message of cheer to your brothers who fell, the only message, I believe, for which they crave; ... They want to know if you have learned wisely from

what befell them; if you have, they will be braced in the feeling that they did not die in vain. Some of them think they did....To us they have passed away; but are you who stepped into their heritage only yesterday... are you already relegating them to the shades?

I suggest that Barrie stepped out of the shadows of the boy who would never grow up, and that the Echoes plays offer us the opportunity to do the same.

While it is obviously much better to see plays than to read them, I hope that by talking about them I have at least done some justice to Barrie's legacy. As the Centenary Commemorations themselves become echoes, as we are left only with words, it is more important than ever to remember. Barrie can help us do that.

'They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old

Age shall not wither them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,

We shall remember them.'

It is morning. It is time to remember.