

# A Noise Within Study Guide



# Dear Brutus

*Destiny's  
Embrace*  
A NOISE  
WITHIN  
2007/08 SEASON



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# Dear Brutus

## Cast of Characters/Synopsis

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### Mr. Dearth

A man of about forty who is an artist. A good man who has gone wrong and hates himself for it.

### Mrs. Dearth

A lady of thirty-five with a fascinating but dangerous character; discontented with her life.

### Mr. Purdie

A young barrister with a deeply passionate nature who has a fondness for Joanna.

### Mrs. Purdie

A simple, young wife

### Mr. Coade

A happy, lazy old man

### Mrs. Coade

A delightful lady in her 60's

### Lob

The gnome-like owner of Sinister Warren, a large country house in a remote part of England

### Matey

Lob's furtive butler

### Joanna Trout

A sentimental, but good woman

### Lady Caroline Laney

A languid lady, with a drawling insolent manner

### Margaret

A boyish, young girl. The daughter of Mr. Dearth's dreams.



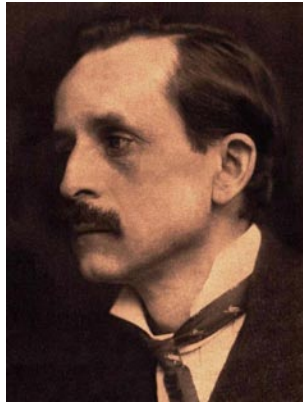
**MR LOB, AN ODD, ELFIN FELLOW**, invites eight guests to his country house where upon entering; they are warned by the butler to beware of Lob's mysterious forest.

All the guests have problems related to the past, so when Mr Lob invites them to enter the enchanted wood and have a second chance in life, they cannot resist. Once there, they make the same mistakes as they did the first time round: the thief still steals, the philanderer still cheats on his wife and the unhappy are still unhappy. All are disappointed except for the artist who meets the daughter he had always wanted, but never had.

Upon returning to the real world, Barrie poses the following question: Is it possible to change our lives and our characters? The characters realize the futility of their original desires, but have come to terms with their situation in life. The artist is grateful for the experience, but is happy to return to the unfulfilled life that he has with his wife. ❖

# About the Author

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## J.M. Barrie, 1st Baronet, OM

(1860–1937)

**JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE** was born in Kirriemuir, Angus into a family of weavers and was the second youngest of ten children. He was educated at the Glasgow Academy, Forfar Academy, Dumfries Academy and the University of Edinburgh.

When James was six, his brother David died in a skating accident at the age of fourteen. This had a profound effect on James. His mother never recovered from the loss and found solace in the fact that her dead son would always remain a boy, never to grow up to leave her.

After university, James became a journalist in Nottingham and eventually moved to London where he began to write novels and plays.

Barrie early novels were set in Kirriemuir and he often wrote the dialogue in Scots. These novels were hugely successful: *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888), *A Window in Thrums* (1889), *The Little Minister* (1891). His 'Tommy' novels: *Sentimental Tommy* (1896) and *Tommy and Grizel* (1902) dealt with themes that would later develop into *Peter Pan*. Pan's first appearance was in *The Little White Bird* (1901).

In 1894 he married the actress Mary Ansell who had appeared in his play *Walker, London*. Their marriage was dissolved in 1909.

Barrie's most famous work, *Peter Pan*, had its premiere on December 27, 1904. In 1929 he gave the copyright to the nation's leading children's hospital, The Great Ormond

Street Hospital for Sick Children and the gift has provided a vital source of income to the hospital. The UK copyright expired in 1987 and in 1988 Parliament granted a unique dispensation granting the hospital rights to royalties from all stage performances in perpetuity.

After *Peter Pan*, Barrie wrote two more fantasy plays, *Dear Brutus* (1917) and *Mary Rose* (1920) in which a mother searches for her lost child and eventually becomes a ghost herself.

Barrie's penthouse at the Adelphi Terrace was visited by the rich and famous including members of the aristocracy, politicians and stars of stage and screen. He had many literary acquaintances including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Bernard Shaw, Jerome K. Jerome, H.G. Wells and Thomas Hardy. Barrie was an avid cricketer and formed a team which included Conan Doyle, Jerome, and Wells along with G.K. Chesterton, A.A. Milne and P.G. Wodehouse. Other friends included Robert Falcon Scott and he was one of the last recipients of letters that Scott wrote in the final hours of his life. On several occasions, he told stories to the young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret Rose.

He was made a baronet in 1913. The title was not inherited. He received the Order of Merit in 1922.

Barrie died on June 3rd, 1937. ❖

## WORKS BY J.M. BARRIE

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### Novels

*Caught Napping* (1883)  
*The New Amphion* (1886)  
*Auld Licht Idylls* (1888)  
*Better Dead* (1888)  
*When a Man's Single* (1888)  
*A Window in the Thrums* (1889)  
*An Edinburgh Eleven* (1889)  
*My Lady Nicotine* (1890)  
*The Little Minister* (1891)  
*A Holiday in Bed/Life in a Country Manse* (1892)  
*Tillyloss Scandal* (1883)  
*Two of Them* (1893)  
*Becky Sharp* (1893) (adaptation of  
*Vanity Fair* by Thackeray)  
*An Auld Licht Manse* (1893)  
*Scotland's Lament* (1895)  
*Margaret Ogilvy* (1896)  
*Tommy and Grizel* (1896)  
*Sentimental Tommy* (1896)  
*The Wedding Guest* (1900)  
*The Little White Bird* (1902)  
*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906)  
*Walker, London* (1907)  
*When Wendy Grew Up — an Afterthought* (1908)  
*Peter and Wendy* (1911)  
*A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916)  
*Dear Brutus* (1917)  
*What Every Woman Knows* (1917)  
*Echoes of War* (1918)  
*Barbara's Wedding* (1927)

### Plays

*Bandolero, the Bandit* (1877)  
*Ibsen's Ghost* (1891)  
*Richard Savage* (1891) (with H.B. Marriot-Watson)  
*Walker, London* (1892)  
*Professor's Love Story* (1892)  
*Jane Annie* (1893) (with Arthur Conan Doyle)  
*A Platonic Friendship* (1898)  
*Quality Street* (1902)  
*The Admirable Crichton* (1902)  
*Peter Pan* (1904)  
*Pantaloon* (1905)  
*Alice Sit-By-the-Fire* (1905)  
*Josephine* (1906)  
*Punch* (1906)  
*What Every Woman Knows* (1908)  
*Old Friends* (1910)  
*A Slice of Life* (1910)  
*The Twelve-Pound Look* (1910)  
*Rosalind* (1912)  
*The Dramatists Get What They Want* (1912)  
*The Will* (1913)  
*Half an Hour* (1913)  
*The Adored One* (1913)  
*Half Hours* (1914)  
*Der Tag* (1914)  
*Rosy Rapture, the Pride of the Beauty Chorus* (1915)  
*The Fatal Typist* (1915)  
*The New Word* (1915)  
*The Real Thing At Last* (1916)  
*Irene Vanbrugh's Pantomime* (1916)  
*Shakespeare's Legacy* (1916)  
*A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916)  
*Dear Brutus* (1917)  
*The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* (1917)  
*Reconstructing the Crime* (1917)  
*A Well-Remembered Voice* (1918)  
*The Truth About the Russian Dancers* (1920)  
*Mary Rose* (1920)  
*Shall We Join the Ladies* (1921) (with L.E. Jones)  
*Neil and Tintinnabulum* (1925)  
*The Boy David* (1936)

# About the Play

## Theatre in Post-Victorian England



**J.M. BARRIE** was one of a number of playwrights coming to prominence in the post-Victorian era, during the reign of Edward VII (1901 – 1910). This period is sometimes referred to as the *Belle Époque* or “beautiful era”. This period was characterized by a unique style in architecture, fashion and the decadence of life. Art Nouveau had a particularly strong influence followed by the Arts and Crafts period led by William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite artists of the day.

Upon the death of Edward VII, George V ascended the throne. Unlike his grandmother and his father, who both exerted great political influence on the world stage, George was considerably more humble. He wished to embody the qualities that he saw as England’s

greatest attributes: dignity and duty. He transformed the monarchy from a political machine to one of traditional values and customs, particularly stressing the family.

This was a time in which art and literature flourished. Novels and short stories were being consumed by all classes; although there were distinct differences between the highbrow literature being read by the upper classes and popular fiction. Some of the best-known names in fiction wrote their masterpieces: H.G. Wells, E.M. Forster, P.G. Wodehouse and Joseph Conrad, to name a few.

Theatre was going through a metamorphosis as demonstrated by the rise of the “New Drama”, where many dramatists experimented



with form and language. Although many playwrights challenged the realism, which had been the fashion through the Victorian era, they did not drastically alter the status quo.

In addition to Barrie, other playwrights of this period included George Bernard Shaw who infused his social commentary with wit and humor, Harley Granville Barker and J.B. Priestley as well as imports from the continent like Ibsen and Hauptmann.

In Ireland a renaissance of literature in the early twentieth century was initiated by the works of W.B. Yeats with such dramas as *At the Hawk's Well* (1916). John Millington Synge's plays drew on life in the Irish countryside writing both tragic and comic plays like *Riders to the Sea* (1904) and *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907). These playwrights were succeeded by Sean O'Casey with such plays as *Juno and the Paycock* (1924).

Theatre was run and managed by the Actor Managers. A permanent company would be

formed by a leading actor who chose his own plays, took a leading role in them, and handled the day-to-day business and financial arrangements of the company. This was not a new innovation to theatre; actors such as David Garrick and Colley Cibber ran their own companies in the eighteenth century. In the late nineteenth century, Henry Irving was the first actor to be knighted and was the successful manager of the Lyceum Theatre. Other notable actor managers of the period were Sir George Alexander and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

Gerald du Maurier (1873-1934) was one of the great British Actor-Managers He was the son of the writer George du Maurier, the brother of Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and the father of Dame Daphne du Maurier, author of such novels as *Rebecca*, *Jamaica Inn* and *My Cousin Rachel*.

Du Maurier originally pursued a career in business, but realized that his heart lay in the theatre. He quickly became popular for his realistic style of acting. Du Maurier was one



Gerald du Maurier



of Barrie's preferred actors and played Captain Hook in the first production of *Peter Pan* at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1904 and it was his idea for the same actor to play both Mr. Darling and Hook. He appeared in the original casts of other Barrie plays such as *The Admirable Crichton* and *Dear Brutus*. He was the manager of Wyndham's Theatre from 1910 to 1925 and then moved to the St James Theatre. He was knighted for his services to the theatre at the peak of

his popularity. He was also one of the first celebrity endorsers and a brand of cigarette, The du Maurier, is named for him. The period of the Actor Manager effectively ended with the outbreak of World War I and the rise in popularity of Music Hall.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, light comedy and farce became the order of the day, with some more serious pieces making occasional appearances. Theatre tended to be more escapist which was not surprising considering the horrors of the war that was raging just across the English Channel. ❖



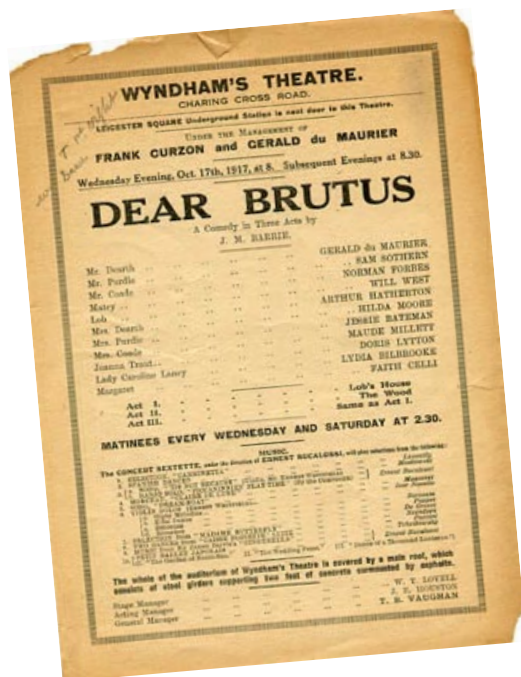
# Dear Brutus

## A Production History



Men at some time are masters of their fates:  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act I, Scene II



**JAMES BARRIE** was regarded as a genius by his contemporaries, but is generally dismissed by today's critics. Of his large body of work, only *Peter Pan*, *Dear Brutus* and *Mary Rose* are mentioned with any regularity. As a writer, Barrie has suffered more than his contemporaries from Freudian criticism, which was in vogue during his lifetime. Some critics isolated the Oedipal themes of his work.

Ironically, he is less popular in his Scottish homeland than he is in other parts of the world — perhaps because he dared to rival Robert Burns or perhaps it is because he holds up Scottish stereotypes to entertain English audiences and is seen as a sort of literary traitor. For today's critics Barrie's work seems simplistic in its charm and chose to entertain and enthrall rather than provoke deep social commentary like his contemporary George Bernard Shaw.

Barrie wrote *Dear Brutus* in 1917 and referred to the play in some of his correspondence:

From J.M. Barrie to Turley  
1917-10-06

You evidently have your trials and I guess there are worse than you make out. After a raid it is quaint to see people emerging like worms from their holes to search the Terrace for bits of shrapnel. Some on my roof every evening last week. I have Jack's\* wife staying with me for the moment. He is in the hospital at Portsmouth and not all well at present. She is very nice and attractive, I'm happy to say...I am rehearsing a play [Dear Brutus] about people who think they could make so much more of life if they got a second chance. I like the subject but the treatment is a bit sketchy.



Maude Adams

From J.M. Barrie to Maude Adams\*\*  
1917-11-02

I enclose a copy of "Dear Brutus" and may seem to have been long in doing so, but not really as I have only got fresh copies today. I alter so much in rehearsal that I was reluctant to send you anything but the final form. How I wish there had been some grand women's part for you in it, that would make all the difference in the interest of the play for me. What I should love in any case would be that you should produce it. As you will see it is a rather delicate affair, and I'm sure you could do to it what no one else could do. I understand you are far away just now in the West. I do wish I could drop in and see your Cinderella. My love to you.



Charles Frohman, producer

*Dear Brutus* opened at Wyndham's Theatre (under management by Gerald du Maurier) in late 1917. It was also published as a novel in the same year. The original production starred Gerald du Maurier as Dearth.

Barrie's London and New York producer for many of his productions was Charles Frohman, an American who was known for his ability to develop talent. His stars included Ethel Barrymore, John Drew and Maude Adams, among others. He founded the Empire Theatre Stock Company in order to buy the Empire Theatre in 1892 and produced his first play the following year. He soon acquired five other New York City theatres. In 1896, Frohman, along with five other partners formed the Theatrical Syndicate. Their organization established systemized contract and booking networks throughout the U.S. creating a theatrical monopoly that was unrivalled until the Shubert brothers broke the stronghold.

In 1897, Frohman leased the Duke of York's Theatre in London, establishing a system of theatrical exchange between there and New York. *Peter Pan* was one of his most famous successes. In partnership with Seymour Hicks, Frohman produced other Barrie plays including *Quality Street* in 1902, *The Admirable Crichton* in 1903. In 1910 Frohman established a repertory scheme of plays at the Duke of York's which included plays by Barrie, John Galsworthy, Harley Granville Barker and others. Although this may have been successful, Frohman cancelled the program when the theatres were closed for a period of mourning for King Edward VII in 1910. By 1915, Frohman had produced over

\*One of the Llewelyn Davies boys (George, John or Jack, Michael, Peter and Nicholas), who were entrusted to Barrie upon the deaths of their parents, Arthur and Sylvia (nee de Maurier) Llewelyn Davies. The relationship between the Llewelyn Davies' and Barrie was fictionalised in the 2004 film *Finding Neverland*. Barrie suffered bereavements with the boys: George was killed in action in World War I and Michael drowned in 1921 in a possible suicide pact. Peter would also commit suicide in 1960.

\*\*One of the greatest actresses of her day. Maude Adams was an American, originally from Salt Lake City. She made her Broadway debut in 1888 and appeared as the star of Barrie's *The Little Minster* (1897) which Barrie had written especially for her. She appeared in other American productions of his work: *Quality Street* (1901), *Peter Pan* (1905), *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), *Rosalind* (1914) and *A Kiss for Cinderella* (1916). She also excelled in Shakespearean roles such as Viola, Rosalind and Juliet.



William Gillette and Helen Hayes

700 shows and controlled five theatres in London, six in New York and over 200 throughout the rest of the U.S. He died in the 1915 sinking of the *Lusitania* and was reported by survivors to have declined a seat on a lifeboat saying, "Why fear death? It is the greatest adventure in life" echoing a line from Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Frohman's company would produce Barrie's *Dear Brutus* on Broadway.

The original Broadway production had its premiere at the Empire Theatre on December 23, 1918 and ran for 184 performances. The cast featured William Gillette as Dearth and Helen Hayes (making her Broadway) debut as Margaret.

*Dear Brutus* was filmed as part of the "Play for Today" series by the BBC in 1981 with a cast that featured Frank Finlay as Dearth.

CBS Radio included *Dear Brutus* as part of its series "Cavalcade of America". This radio play featured Frederic March as Dearth and was broadcast on March 16, 1942. ❖



# About the Play

## English Fantasy – Myth and Magic

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Beowulf

**THROUGHOUT EVERY CULTURE,** fantasy stories have always held a great appeal, either as an escape from the harshness of reality, or to enchant by a fire on a cold winter's eve. English tradition is rich in stories of magic and enchanted beings — of imps and fairies. The origins of the English fantasy go back as far as the 8th century, to one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon epic poems, *Beowulf*.

Medieval writers often demonstrated the natural and the supernatural side by side mingling chivalry with magic swords, rings and spells. In *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1136), Geoffrey of Monmouth interweaves the history of Britain with myths and legends and introduces the character of Merlin, a wizard and prophet.

The *Gesta Romanorum* was a collection of stories from many different sources compiled in the late 13th century that was popular over

several centuries. Clerics would sometimes refer to this collection in their sermons in order to keep their listeners' attention.

Sir Thomas Malory in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, printed in 1485, takes his sources from both French and Anglo Saxon material, but introduces magic in the form of the enchanted sword Excalibur and enchantresses like Morgan le Fay. In the 14th century, the epic poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* shows how Sir Gawain's honor is tempted by magic King Arthur celebrating with his knights.

In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (c.1387), the Wife of Bath talks about fairies and elves and in "The Squire's Tale", an Arabian king sends magic gifts to the King of Tartary and his daughter. Chaucer's own tale is the story of a king who meets the Fairy Queen and a three-headed giant.



A French romance of the same period, *Huon de Bordeaux*, which was translated into English by Sir John Bourchier introduces Oberon, King of the Fairies who was the son of Julius Caesar and Morgan le Fay. Oberon is described as “a 3-foot being of ‘aungelyke visage’.

After the medieval period, Arthurian legend generally disappears and is used very little by writers until the 19th century. The Elizabethans, however, were obsessed with fairies and they appear in poetry, plays, masques and songs.

Writers like Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* of 1590 utilize fairies, but their sources are Italian poetry and their fairies are allegorical figures, not those of British myth. Ben Jonson referred to his fellow writers’ obsession with

fairies and magic as a national mania, but in order to be popular he includes them in his works *The Satyr* (1603) and *Oberon, the Fairy Prince* (1611).



Puck

Shakespeare’s use of fairies and sprites is perhaps the greatest example of England’s obsession with the supernatural and in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* he actually creates a new species of fairy — the kinder, gentler fairy. Prior to this, fairies were thought to be mischievous, destructive creatures that worked witchcraft. Shakespeare’s

take on Puck is a great example of this.

A puck or *pouke* was a word denoting a class of demon — a little devil. In Ben Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* of 1616, he is called *Pug*. Shakespeare combines Puck with Robin

Goodfellow, a hobgoblin. Hobgoblins were originally earthy spirits who did household chores in exchange for a saucer of milk, but had impish qualities. In *The Mad Prankes and Merry Jestes of Robin Goodfellow* printed in 1626 but written forty years earlier, Robin Goodfellow is the son of Oberon who gives Robin magic gifts like the ability to change shape in order to 'vex both fool and knave' and is 'famozed in every old wives chronicle for his mad merrye prankes'. Shakespeare softens his fairies perhaps because *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written to celebrate a royal marriage.

Fairies of English origin were originally the size of small men, like Lob in *Dear Brutus*. Shakespeare transforms them into the minute beings that we know and love, able to fit in cowslips ears. Poets like Michael Drayton in *Nymphidia* of 1627 and Robert Herrick in his collection of fairy poems, *Hesperides* written in 1648 wrote of elaborate fairy revels with glorious costumes in fairy palaces. These stories were generally read by the upper classes with lower classes enjoying stories like *The Historie of Tom Thumbe, the Little* by Richard Johnson of which the earliest known copy is 1621. In this story, Merlin makes a deal with an elderly couple promising them a child. Tom is delivered by the Queen of the Fairies, who gives him magical gifts. He suffers a series of adventures including being eaten by a cow, snatched by a raven. Tom Thumbe had made an earlier appearance in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* written in 1584.

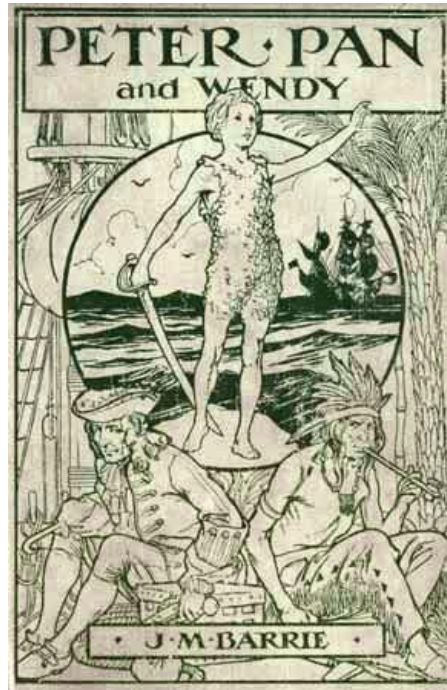
The story of Tom Thumb was used as an example by Puritan ministers who preached that all works of imagination were damnable lies and therefore wicked in nature. John Bunyan wrote was distressed at the Puritans' banishment of fairies saying, "now alas, they are all dead; or gone beyond the seas." This Puritanical view of fairies and their stories lasted longer the newly discovered American colonies than in the mother country.

Fairies and their legends did not fare well during the early part of the 18th century when they were considered to belong to the ignorant. When Sarah Fielding introduced fairies into her novel *The Governess* in 1749, she warned her readers that all sorts of "supernatural assistances in a story" should only be used to point out a moral. In what sparse fantastical writing there was during the 18th century, oriental magic took hold. Writers produced stories set in exotic locations with magical talismans and genii.

However, at the end of the eighteenth century, the supernatural became trendy again. Paintings such as Reynolds' work of Shakespeare's Puck was greatly admired. Other leading artists such as Fuseli in his erotic homage to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and William Blake in his 1816 illustrations for Milton's *L'Allegro* used fairies as integral features in their work. Fashionable writers soon followed suit. Sir Walter Scott included an essay, "Fairies of Popular Superstition" in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* written in 1801 and the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is based on a legend about goblins from the Border. His protégé, James Hogg, wrote *Kilmeny* included in *The Queen's Wake*, in which a girl walks into a land of fairies that she cannot bear to leave. Cristina Rosetti wrote a dark poem *Goblin Market* in 1862.

Stories by the Brothers Grimm were translated into English around 1823. Translations of Hans Christian Anderson's stories appeared in translation in 1846. Victorian painters captured fairies on a grand scale on huge canvases: J.M.W. Turner's *Queen Mab's Cave*, Paton's *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania*, and anything by John Anster Fitzgerald who was perhaps the greatest fairy painter of all time, depicted fairies in great detail.

Theatre of the day was a big influence on visual and literary artists. Stage productions were lavish and utilized spectacular scenery, machinery and lighting. In Charles Kean's 1866 production of *The Tempest*, Ariel sailed



on a dolphin's back and rode on a bat while Prospero's liberated spirits flew through the air. Traditional Christmas pantomimes were based on fairy stories.

Much can be written of children's literature, another topic altogether, which was filled with fairy stories. The first purposefully written full-length children's tale in English was Francis Paget's *The Hope of the Katzekops* written in 1844. Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books written in 1865 and 1871 have been cited as a landmark of children's literature. They are indeed original with no derivation from earlier works and indeed do not really have a moral to them. Carroll did write one fairy story, *Sylvie and Bruno*, but this work was unsuccessful.

The beginning of the 20th century saw a resurgence of the British passion for fairies. Perhaps this was as a release to the staid and strict Victorian culture. Victorian writers such as Oscar Wilde, Frances Browne and John Ruskin took their inspiration from French and German fairy stories, owing much to the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Anderson.

In 1901 Seymour Hicks' play *Bluebell in Fairyland* made such an impression on J.M. Barrie that he went on to write *Peter Pan*. In 1904, that play prompted the audience to applaud and enthusiastically admit that they did believe in fairies. Barrie went on to write two other fantasy plays: *Dear Brutus* in which eight people are invited by an elfin host

to seek their hearts desire in an enchanted forest and *Mary Rose* written in 1920, a story about a mortal vanishing for a lifetime and reappearing no older, not knowing what has passed.

Throughout the 20th century, writers like E. Nesbit, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Rudyard Kipling used fairies in their work, but it took a don from Magdalen College in Oxford to create whole fantasy world, and in turn, take the world by storm. J.R.R. Tolkien took fairies and fantasy to a new level with *The Lord of The Rings*. The trilogy, which took over two decades to write, started with *The Hobbit*, which was written as the sequel. In this masterpiece, Tolkien creates his own geography, language, history and legends of Middle Earth. Other writers such as C.S. Lewis (a fellow don at Magdalen) in his *Chronicles of Narnia* (written between 1950 and 1956), Peter Carey in *The Unusual Life of Tristan Smith* (1994) and T.H. White in his *The Sword in the Stone* continued in this vein.

In recent times, Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* has achieved success both in print and on the stage and the soon to be released movie, *The Golden Compass* the first book of the trilogy. Perhaps none of these modern fantasy writers can rival the success and impact that J.K. Rowling has had with the Harry Potter books in which magic and the "muggle" world exist side by side. ❖

# About the Play

## The House Party

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**FROM JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS,** Noel Coward's *Hay Fever* and J.B. Priestley's *Dangerous Corner* to Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* and Robert Altman's *Gosford Park*, the country house party has been a backdrop for many a novel, play or film. A house party is an obvious choice for a who-dunit or a situation comedy as it forces together a collection of people whom, except for the shared acquaintance of the hosts, might not normally meet under regular circumstances.

The country house party defined English high society for nearly 200 years. With good roads on which to travel, improving transportation with the advent of the steam engine, it was rather dull for the aristocracy to sit around in their own drafty country piles with only peasants for neighbours.

Inevitably in a house party, there are among the well heeled, a microcosm of society: the new moneyed, social climbers and the penniless aristocrats, along with the elegant hosts, with perhaps a celebrity or an eccentric artist to brighten things up. Having fun in high society is expensive and there were always people willing to pay dearly for social acceptance.

House parties were a chance for the hosts to show off their country estates and plan a tasteful program of events to exhibit their good taste and wealth and for the guests, a chance to network in a world, particularly in England that relied (and still does) so much on social status. Husbands could pursue business and fraternize while wives and daughters could network with those of comparable social standing.

A typical house party would begin on with guests arriving in the late afternoon with their personal maids and valets as well as copious amounts of luggage containing clothes and personal items for afternoon, evening and country pursuits. They would bring with them their guns for shooting, racquets for tennis (from the late 1800's) and fox hunting attire.

After a welcome spot of tea, guests would retire to their rooms where their clothes would have already been unpacked by their maid or valet to dress for dinner. Dinner was a full evening affair with pre-dinner drinks followed by an elegant meal. Guests would be seated at dinner according to their social

standing. Following dinner, gentlemen would retire to the smoking room to enjoy imported cigars and discuss business while the womenfolk would move to the drawing room to play cards or gossip. They would eventually be joined by the men.

Breakfast was the one meal not served by staff and was partaken buffet style. After breakfast, the men would be taken by their host for a round of shooting, or all would enjoy fox hunting.

After a refreshing jaunt in the fresh air the guests would be served lunch, followed by tea at 4:00. Another sumptuous dinner would follow in the evening. Guests would leave after breakfast the next morning during which their personal maid or valet would have packed the luggage and it would be placed on a waiting car or carriage.

Of course there were the house parties that lasted for longer an extended period of time, especially in the early 1800's when aristocratic gentlemen did not go to work as such and were not needed "in town" (e.g. London).

Below stairs, country houses would have accommodation for visiting staff as well as regular employees of the hosts. Servants of invited guests were ranked according to the social standing of their employers. Like all those in service, they were rarely seen in common areas of the house and had access to their employers' guest rooms, the servants' quarters and the below-stairs areas: the kitchens, servants dining areas and laundry areas.

There are excellent books on the phenomenon that is the English Country House Party: *The English Country House Party* by Phyllida Barstow, *The English Country House: A Grand Tour* by Gervase Jackson-Stops, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* by Peter Mandler and *Ladies of the Manor* by Pamela Horn. Robert Altman's film *Gosford Park* is also an excellent example of upstairs downstairs at a country house party in the period between World War I and World War II and is fairly accurate as Altman had a number of people acting as consultants who had been in service during that time. The BBC's *Upstairs Downstairs* and the *Forsyte Saga* also show life in English high society.



# Bibliography/Resources

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## Resources on the Web:

The writer of this study guide would like to thank Wikipedia for a bottomless source of information.

For more information on J. M. Barrie including film footage, log onto [www.jmbarrie.co.uk](http://www.jmbarrie.co.uk).

# About Theatre Arts



## Being an Audience Member

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of entertainment: going to the theatre. But attending a live performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of spending time. In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd. Although in the past playhouses could sometimes be rowdy, today participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance. Shouting out or even whispering can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After *A Noise Within*'s performance of *Dear Brutus*, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

## Theatre Vocabulary

These terms will be included in pre- and post-performance discussions at *A Noise Within*.

**blocking:** The instructions a director gives his actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

**character:** The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

**conflict:** The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

**dramatic irony:** A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

**genre:** Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

**motivation:** The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

**props:** Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they

are manufactured in the theatre shop.

**proscenium stage:** There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

**set:** The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

**setting:** The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

**stage areas:** The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

**theme:** The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

**thrust stage:** A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

## Theatre Lore

### *Why do actors say “break a leg”?*

Perhaps the saying comes—in a complicated way—from the use of “leg.” In theatre, a “leg” is a part of the mechanics that open and close the curtain. To break a leg is to earn so many curtain calls that opening and closing the curtain over and over during final applause causes the curtain mechanics to break. At the outset of theatre tradition, players acted outdoors, where there were no stages or curtains. Applause came in the form of foot stomping, which could indicate another origin of this phrase.

### *Why is it bad luck to say “Macbeth” inside the theatre?*

There are many origins for this superstition. Old actors believe the witches’ song in *Macbeth* to possess the uncanny power of casting evil spells. The reasons for this fear usually bring tales of accidents and ill-fortunes that have plagued productions of the play throughout the world.

An alternative is that the superstition began in the days of stock companies, which would struggle to remain in business. Frequently, near the end of a season, a company would realize it was not going to break even, and, in an attempt to boost ticket sales, would announce the production of a crowd favorite: *Macbeth*. If times were particularly bad, the play would frequently be a portent of the company’s demise.

### *What is a ghost light?*

There is a superstition that if an emptied theater is ever left completely dark, a ghost will take up residence. In other versions of the same superstition the ghosts of past performances return to the stage to live out their glory moments. To prevent this, a single light called a ghost light is left burning at center stage after the audience and all of the actors and musicians have gone.

Now, those in the world of theatre know that a “dark” theatre is one without a play. There is nothing sadder to a dramatic artist than an empty house and a playless stage. Therefore, a light is left burning center stage so that the theatre is never “dark;” it is simply awaiting the next production.

### *What is a raked stage? Where do the terms upstage and downstage originate?*

Historically, stages were built on inclines, with the backs of the stages slightly higher than the fronts. The incline was called a rake and helped those in the back of the audience see the action onstage. Eventually, theatres started placing seats on inclines instead of stages, but the terminology stuck. Downstage is the front of the stage, closest to the audience, and upstage is the back of the stage. Some theatres, like A Noise Within, still participate in the tradition of using raked stages.

### *Why are actors called thespians?*

In the sixth century B.C., a Greek chorus performer named Thespis was the first person in history to step away from the chorus and speak by himself, exchanging dialogue with the group and impersonating a character instead of simply reciting a story as the chorus had done before then. ❖

# About A Noise Within

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**A Noise Within's mission** is to produce the great works of world drama in rotating repertory, with a company of professional, classically-trained actors. *A Noise Within* educates the public through comprehensive outreach efforts and conservatory training programs that foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of history's greatest plays and playwrights.

As the only company in southern California working in the repertory tradition (rotating productions using a resident ensemble of professional, trained artists), *A Noise Within* is dedicated solely to producing classical literature from authors such as Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Shaw, and Euripedes.

The company was formed in 1991 by founders Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, both of whom were classically trained at the acclaimed American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. They envisioned *A Noise Within* after recognizing a lack of professional, classical productions and education in Southern California and sought out and assembled their own company of actors to meet the need. All of *A Noise Within's* resident artists have been classically

trained, and many hold Master of Fine Arts degrees from some of the nation's most respected institutions, such as Juilliard, Yale, and the American Conservatory Theatre. In its fourteen-year history, *A Noise Within* has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

In 2004, *A Noise Within* accepted an invitation to collaborate with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for a tandem performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Hollywood Bowl.

More than 25,000 individuals attend productions at *A Noise Within*, annually, and between performances at the theatre and touring productions, the company draws 13,000 student participants to its arts education programs every year. Students benefit from in-school workshops, conservatory training, and an internship program, as well as subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, discussions with artists, and state standards-compliant study guides.

## A Noise Within Study Guide

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