**Smugglers, Husbands, and Doppelgängers: J.M. Barrie and *Home Chimes***

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When Herbert Garland prepared his bibliography of J.M. Barrie’s writings published in 1928, he was faced with a near impossible task so far as the author’s early contributions to periodicals and newspapers were concerned. The 24 pages he produced form little more than a preliminary record of the many essays, leaders, sketches and short stories Barrie contributed to numerous newspapers and periodicals. The entries ranged from critical essays on Meredith, Hardy, Kipling and Sabine Baring-Gould for the prestigious monthly magazine the *Contemporary Review*, to some of the thousands of column inches Barrie composed while working as a leader-writer on the *Nottingham Journal*. For the latter Garland was able to draw on J.A. Hammerton’s *J.M. Barrie and His Books* (1900), and he augmented Hammerton’s record to almost a hundred items. Though scarcely adequate, the lists he compiled for many other periodicals remain the most extensive snapshots of Barrie’s output as a young journalist, critic, and prose writer in his twenties and early thirties.

Garland’s volume was intended principally to serve the interests of collectors of Barrie’s first editions, and his record of the author’s periodical writings did not claim to be comprehensive. Establishing the authorship of anonymous newspaper leaders after a lapse of some forty years was impossible, he declared with some justification. A reviewer in the *Bookman* from April 1929 nevertheless took him to task for omitting some key items from the *British Weekly* and overlooking several of the author’s literary causeries for the *Speaker*. It also made the less convincing claim that Barrie’s total contributions to the *Scots Observer* and its successor the *National Observer* exceeded the nine items listed in the bibliography. It is easy to be harsh on Garland’s endeavours. He delved deeply into the pages of some papers, notably the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* and the *St James’s Gazette*, although he missed an important sketch from the latter, ‘The School House’, later reworked as the striking opening chapter of *Auld Licht Idylls*. He was less assiduous with others, however. He does not list any of the author’s contributions to the *Scotsman*, on which he came close to securing a permanent position in 1886 through the influence of his friend Alexander Riach. According to Denis Mackail Barrie was still writing articles and theatre reviews for the paper as late as 1891.[[1]](#footnote-1) Nor does Garland reference any of the signed contributions to the monthly magazine *Time*, which included a series of twelve articles on theatrical topics under the title ‘What the Pit Says’ published across 1889. Close study of the dates of Barrie’s contributions to these and other magazines is always instructive. *Time* was the house magazine of Swan Sonnenschein, and Barrie’s first contribution appeared in May 1888, just as reviews of *Auld Licht Idylls* were appearing, and five months after Sonnenschein had printed a new impression of Barrie’s first book, *Better Dead*. Victorian publishers knew their business.

What all this shows is not only Barrie’s extraordinary industry as a journalist, but the range and variety of his literary networks. Too often seen predominantly in terms of his connection with William Robertson Nicoll and the *British Weekly* – an association which suits commentators eager to relegate Barrie to the Kailyard – his activities as a freelance journalist brought him into contact with many different editors and fellow authors. As Jerome K. Jerome wrote in his autobiography referring to another magazine with which Barrie was closely associated, ‘in those days, there was often a fine friendship between an editor and his contributors. There was a feeling that all were members one of another, sharing a common loyalty.’[[2]](#footnote-2) Barrie discovered this in more than one publishing context, and his ability to shape his contributions to the demands of different magazines but retain a distinctive style of his own was not the least of his accomplishments as a writer. It made him peculiarly suited to the era of New Journalism.

It is symptomatic of the continued preoccupation with Barrie’s personal life at the expense of his literary life that no biographer since Hammerton, in the volume mentioned above and in his later *Barrie: the story of a genius* (1929), has made any effort at original research in this area. And notwithstanding the work of R.D.S. Jack, we still await a detailed account of the output of nearly two years that constitutes Barrie’s work on the *Nottingham Journal* – daily leaders, weekly special articles, a gossip column, book reviews, and an early attempt at fiction, ‘Vagabond Students’. The task is now more possible than ever with the aid of online databases and digitised copies of historical newspapers and magazines. The *Nottingham Journal* can be accessed digitally via the British Newspaper Archive (britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk). Other papers, including alas the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch*, can only be viewed in the original in relevant public libraries.

The paper that prompted Jerome’s remark about shared common loyalties was *Home Chimes* which was the first metropolitan magazine to print an article bearing Barrie’s name. While not entirely overlooked, its significance to the author’s early career has been underplayed. Best known for having serialised Jerome’s *Three Men in a Boat* over 1888-89, *Home Chimes* commenced as a penny weekly on 2 January 1884 but switched to a self-styled ‘high class monthly’, costing fourpence, in January 1886. It was published by Richard Willoughby and edited by F.W. Robinson, a prolific novelist who penned over fifty works of fiction from 1855 to 1898. Although Robinson secured some famous names, including Algernon Swinburne, Coventry Patmore, Bret Harte and William Sharp, the paper, in Jerome’s words, ‘never caught on … and in the end left Robinson poor in his old age.’ Viewed retrospectively, it was probably the lack of strong serial fiction that counted against it.

Barrie’s association with *Home Chimes* did not escape Garland, but he lists only the six contributions made between March 1886 and July 1887 after the paper had become a monthly magazine. There were, however, eleven articles bearing the author’s name published during the periodical’s life as a weekly, from 8 November 1884 to 16 December 1885. These items were recorded (and one briefly discussed) by Hammerton in his 1929 study. Otherwise they have been forgotten. Yet they reveal much about the author’s range of literary interests and show themes and ideas that would later feed into his fiction and plays. The most striking feature about the weekly contributions, on which this essay will focus, is the variety of tone, style and subject matter that characterised Barrie’s fertile pen. Among these articles lie a serious account about Scottish university life, a touching sketch that would later be reworked into the early chapters of the author’s first novel, and a chilling horror story that, in its formal inventiveness, deserves to be better known.

The first two *Home Chimes* sketches were clearly inspired by Barrie’s experiences on the *Nottingham Journal*. They nevertheless contrast in both tone and purpose as Barrie uses his experiences to achieve different literary effects. ‘A Night in a Provincial Newspaper Office’ (8 November 1884) offers an imaginatively coloured but essentially realistic account of the activities and pressures that confront newspaper workers as they respond to the reports and telegrams that will shape the content of the morning paper. The sketch takes a narrative turn when an unexpected news item – the death of a great literary man – disrupts the flow of work between sub-editor, foreman, and compositors. As Hammerton observes, ‘the impersonal descriptive style of ordinary journalism is scrupulously avoided for a definitely personal statement of things seen.’[[3]](#footnote-3) Nevertheless, the sketch is carried not by its fidelity to truth but by the technical elements of the writing, as the following passage recounting the sub-editor’s frenzied work illustrates:

Wildly he manipulates his tools; he tries to write with a brush; he recklessly dabs his pen into the gum-pot; he pauses in mid-air, as it were, because he has no time to sit down. In vain. The ‘devils’ are upon him. ‘Copy!’ shrieks one fiend. ‘Five men standing!’ exultantly yells another. ‘Copy, copy!’ they cry in chorus, and wildly more wildly – recklessly more recklessly – go the scissors of the lightning sub-editor. If you were with him, he would have you slit up, labelled, and in the case-room, you would be set, read, revised, stereotyped, and published as a local, a general, a latest foreign, an advertisement, or a fish market, before anyone had time to notice what had happened.

The series of short clauses, the repetition of words in close proximity to one another, the added touch of the incongruous (a fish market?), all serve to create the briskness of prose necessary to portray the haphazard urgency of the sub-editor.

‘Two Editors and a Pocket Edition of a Woman’ (22 November 1884), by contrast, is overtly fictional and penned in more narrative form. It traces the rivalry between the editors of two newspapers in a provincial town who happily refuse to acknowledge each other until they fall in love with the same girl. The realistic touches of scene-setting are still in place – the printing machine is described as ‘shamming ill, groaning and sputtering like a man in pain’ – but the tone is one of sharp comedy. When the *Courant* misjudges a political contest, the *Mirror* mocks its rival by printing a heading ‘What the *Middlecombe Courant* says’ above a blank space three inches square. Cosens, editor of the *Courant*, retaliates by including extracts from the *Mirror*’s pages alongside snippets from *Punch*, *Fun* and *Judy* in its column ‘Jottings from the Comic Papers’. Barrie presents the story as a mock battle. Brooks, the editor of the *Mirror*, realises ‘he must run through Cosens with his pen or die’; his rival ‘had offered him the choice of two pistols, the one loaded and the other not. He selected the loaded one’, and it was only a matter of time before he ‘blew out his rival’s brains with it.’ Brooks discovers a spy among his ranks who is in the habit of smuggling an early copy of the *Mirror* into the *Courant*’s offices. He inserts a fake news story in a dummy copy about the murder of a radical M.P. When the story duly appears in the columns of the *Courant*, Cosens is defeated. He loses more than just his reputation. Brooks wins the hand of the girl who first sparked the battle, and Cosens suffers the ultimate indignity of having to insert an announcement of the marriage into his own paper. As in much of Barrie’s work, success in love is portrayed as a matter of the survival of the fittest.

These two sketches show traces of ideas that would re-emerge in Barrie’s first serial novel, *When a Man’s Single* (1887-8). The next three contributions, by contrast, take Scotland as their theme or setting. The subject-matter is more varied than might be expected, however. ‘With the Highland Smugglers’ (16 May 1885) fuses fictional and documentary modes. In contrast to his transformation of Kirriemuir into ‘Thrums’, Barrie uses real place names for this narrative sketch of the Jeantown ‘gaugers’ (Jeantown was the nineteenth-century name for the village now known as Lochcarron in Wester Ross). The narrator – an outsider, who cuts a slightly ludicrous figure wading through the water in his ‘elegant knickerbockers’ – is a ‘ready volunteer’ assisting the excisemen on Loch Torridon. By adopting the persona of a documentary investigator, Barrie gives the sketch the style of a newspaper report. But the pen of the journalist is overwritten by the scenic description which evokes myth and legend, and the narrative events which blend realism with gentle farce. The narrator’s expectation of ‘a sensational adventure’ is spoiled when the officers are led astray by the locals who sympathise with the smugglers – like the characters in Compton Mackenzie’s *Whisky Galore* (1947) they value their illicitly distilled whisky. With their boat stolen, the men spend a cold night on the edge of the loch, their minds and bodies disordered by the elements:

Strange were the tricks imagination played even the practical officers of the preventive staff. In the eerie stillness of the night one of them maintained that the jeering laugh of the smugglers was carried to him across the loch; and the lights of heaven were taken for candles burning in the bothy.

Stillness and the suspension of time is, of course, a theme that pervades much of Barrie’s writing. In *Mary Rose* (first performed in 1920), the Hebridean island of Act 2, which is described as being ‘as still as an empty church’ by one of the characters, ‘resumes its stillness’ at the end of the Act when the characters are returned from the fantasy realm to the Sussex manor house of Act 1. Similarly, in Barrie’s final prose tale, *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (1932), the ‘terrible stillness of the glen’ is held accountable by one character for bringing the ghostly past into the present and disturbing the mind of Adam Yestreen. ‘With the Highland Smugglers’ shows how this interest in the relationship between landscape and temporality was in Barrie’s mind from an early stage.

The sketch concludes on a more historical note. The narrator comments that while smuggling is still a favourite pursuit in the region, ‘the glory of the trade departed with the opening up of the Highlands; and the impecunious, slovenly smuggler of to-day, running from his squalid shieling with a whisky cask in his hand, the gauger at his heels, resembles … little the armed hordes of powerful Highlanders that used contemptuously to hustle the representatives of the law out of their way’. The tales he hears of ‘still-heads found buried in marshes, and artful passages beneath apparently disused bothies’ are nevertheless set against the more prosaic description of the ‘tiresome’ journey back to Shieling: the ‘dismal, fatiguing trudge’ across rocks and stones, and through moss and black water.

‘Scotch University Life’ (30 May 1885), offers a striking contrast to this sketch. Here the journalist’s craft is one of balanced observation without any imaginative colouring as Barrie shifts between objective factual details and personal memories of his still recent experiences at Edinburgh (he graduated in 1882). The article begins by attempting to scotch a ‘Scotch’ myth:

The typical Scotch student has been frequently sketched as an interesting but alarming compound of red hair, theology, bad manners, potatoes, red herring, and the bag-pipes. It is then with a natural diffidence that the present writer has to admit that during his course of study at Edinburgh University, he does not remember once hearing the national music discoursed by an undergraduate, and that the only red-headed student of his acquaintance was an Englishman from the neighbourhood of the Thames.

The article is presented as a factual corrective to this stereotype and adopts a largely serious, informative tone throughout. Barrie exhibits pride in his country’s educational system – the Scottish universities are described as ‘cosmopolitan in the best meaning of the word’, opening their doors to ‘students of all nations’ – and in his own *alma mater*: Edinburgh, ‘the most celebrated of the Scotch Universities’, has an attendance of ‘not much under 3,500, numbers that have never been approached by any other University in the United Kingdom.’ The metropolitan reader of *Home Chimes* was furnished with numerous other facts and observations, ranging from essentially mundane details, such as the age range of undergraduates and the fees and duration of study for different courses, to the more critically informative: that Edinburgh retains less French influence than Aberdeen which ‘has adhered to its French names and customs with curious tenacity’; that debating and ‘things theatrical’ are more characteristic recreations than sport – ‘The man who is swift to follow the bounding ball, but slow at conic sections, is not a hero in the North as he is at Oxford or Cambridge’; and that the practice of the poor arts undergraduate supplementing his meagre income by private teaching ‘accounts for the fact that he is deserting the University of St Andrews for the larger towns, twenty tutors being required in Edinburgh’ for every one in the ‘not less romantic city on the coast of Fife’.

Barrie’s main intention, however, seems to have been correcting the romantic view of undergraduate life in Scotland. The ‘characteristically Scotch undergraduate’, he suggests, ‘is the plodding member of the arts classes who looks forward to being a minister or a “dominie”’. The ‘rank and file’ have neither the time nor resources to study divinity or law, while only the wealthiest students (just fifty per cent of which are Scottish) are studying medicine. He gives a measured account of the bursary system – that feature of university entrance that underpins the meritocratic ethos of higher education in Scotland. Dismissing silly legends about places being awarded to the student who could ‘farthest fling the heavy hammer’, and asserting that ‘eccentric bursaries’ such as those ‘limited to scholars of a certain name or locality’ have fallen into abeyance, he maintains that the majority are carried off, not by weavers or ploughmen, but by ‘the duxes of provincial schools’. The use of the Scots word, unglossed, is here telling in its naturalness. In contrast to the opening story of Ian Maclaren’s *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894), there is no uncritical celebration of the ‘lad o’ pairts’ theme, which has often been taken – reductively – as a defining characteristic of the Kailyard genre. Barrie admires the ‘dogged perseverance’ of the untutored youth who trudges year after year from his ‘distant home among the hills to the bursary competition’ but is swift to underline how for many poor scholars life at university was one of unrelenting work. Lodgings are bare and food a luxury. There are traces of humour in this section but little piety:

God only knows how some of these men contrived to keep body and soul together. Some of them failed; and I have a vivid recollection of one who was driven by hunger one fine winter morning, to walk into the street through his window. As he was domiciled some half-dozen flats high, that was the end of him.

The article ends on a more serious note of deflation. No statistics are afforded to show what percentage of students pass their exams, but Barrie estimates at only forty per cent in the medical and art classes:

It may be well again to emphasize that all the students at the Scotch Universities are not poor and needy, and rough and studious. Some of them pay more every week for their sumptuous apartments than Carlyle, in his college days at Edinburgh, spent in a couple of months. As a rule they get plucked and plucked for their degrees until they tire of the monotony, and Providence at last finds them a sphere of action somewhere in the region of Manitoba.

An earlier sketch, ‘Gentleman Chimley’s Affair of the Heart’ (24 January 1885), has university life as a backdrop. It is narrated by a medical student, Smithson, whose attempts to shut himself away from his fellow students and inquisitive landlady – from whom he conceals his anatomical samples – are punctured by the visit of a ‘lordly gentleman’. Chimley is a hopeless idealist who falls in love with every woman he meets. Like the narrator of *My Lady Nicotine* (1891), however, Smithson is a gentle cynic, averse to anything romantic. Smoking his pipe, he listens lazily to Chimley’s account of his latest attachment to a girl named, pathetically enough, ‘Dimples’. When he has at last forced Chimley out of his lodgings, he retires to his room ‘to smoke Dimples’s hair and drink her smile’. The sketch appeared in the same issue of *Home Chimes* as one of Jerome’s series of humorous essays entitled *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* and shares some of their idiom and laconic style.

*Home Chimes* also provided a fresh platform for Barrie’s humorous stories about the Auld Licht Kirk based on his mother’s childhood memories, which a few years later would be reworked into *Auld Licht Idylls* (1888). Hitherto the theme had been confined to the *St James’s Gazette* where six sketches appeared between November 1884 and March 1885. After the publishing firm of Macmillan had declined to issue the sketches in volume form in May 1885, Barrie temporarily abandoned the theme. In September, however, the Auld Lichts resurfaced in two *Home Chimes* sketches. One of these, ‘An Auld Licht Minister’ (19 September 1885), which recounts Gavin Dishart’s struggles with his inquisitiorial congregation, was incorporated with only minor modifications into Chapter 3 of *Auld Licht Idylls*. The other, ‘An Auld Licht Official’ (5 September 1885), which introduced readers to the bellman Snecky Hobart, was reshaped more radically in the volume, the character filtered into the story of the ‘very old family’ with whom he lodges (Chapter 10). This ability to return to previously-published material and recast it in new narrative form is also evident from a later *Home Chimes* sketch, ‘When the Snow Melts’ (19 December 1885), where Barrie adopts the persona of a dominie in a Highland schoolhouse. Some of the ideas and the scenic description in this piece re-emerge in the opening chapter of *Auld Licht Idylls* and in the account of the thaw in Chapter 2. But the material was recast almost wholesale, and the early sketch stands by itself as a substantial piece of descriptive writing, as the opening account of the narrator’s dim vision of a far-off figure shows:

Top-heavy banks of congealed snow make a funnel of the dripping path between my highland school-house and the high road. Taking to-day a telescopic view down its dreary length, I saw it close in for the first time this week on a speck of black. It proved to be no lost crow, but a human being. Like a blind man restored to sight, I watched this growing blotch of colour in a white world, wading knee-deep through the yielding slush.

A further sketch that mentions the Auld Lichts is ‘Davit Lunan. An Auld Licht Idyl’, published on 13 June 1885. Davit Lunan appears in Chapter 9 of *Auld Licht Idylls* where he narrates his ‘political reminiscences’. The *Home Chimes* sketch does not relate to this chapter at all, however. Instead it is an earlier version of the incident that forms the opening two chapters of *When a Man’s Single*, which would not commence serialisation in the *British Weekly* for another two years. In these chapters, the hero Rob Angus becomes ‘free’ to leave his native Thrums and venture south to pursue the literary life when Davy, his four-year-old niece who lives with him, wanders out of his house, disappears, and after a search is found drowned. The *Home Chimes* sketch was plundered substantially with the essential narrative and much of the prose retained. Here, however, the lost girl is Davit Lunan’s daughter and much is made of the widower’s loneliness. Compared to the reworked chapters of the novel, there is a greater concentration of pathos as the events build slowly to their tragic conclusion, and frequent use of pathetic fallacy which Barrie cut when he reshaped the sketch for his serial. During the revision process he also added those touches of humour between the Thrums characters which are less prominent in *Home Chimes*, and included more extensive passages of dialogue in Scots.

Critics have often remarked upon the disconnection between the opening chapters of *When a Man’s Single* and the ensuing tale of Rob’s life on the *Silchester Mirror* and his love affair with Mary Abinger. The disconnection can be accounted for, however, if we trace Barrie’s composition process. Serialisation of *When a Man’s Single* began in September 1887 when the author had only ‘a fragmentary sample’ of the work in hand.[[4]](#footnote-4) Pushed for time, he must have turned to an old sketch to get ahead. The writing of the serial also coincided with the shaping of *Auld Licht Idylls* (published in April 1888) and the two tasks bled into each other. For example, the long opening paragraph of Chapter 2 of *Auld Licht Idylls*, which introduces readers to the geography of Thrums, originally served as the opening paragraph of the serial version of *When a Man’s Single* which had to be cut from the book edition. No wonder the novel seems disjointed. On this occasion Barrie failed to find an artistically satisfying way of incorporating old material into a new setting.

The two remaining sketches reveal Barrie’s facility for moving between different styles and modes of writing. ‘John Hubbard’s Husband’s: A Story of the Tender Passion’ (3 October 1885) belongs to that strain in his writing, characteristic of the 1890s, that playfully subverts gender roles and identities and troubles the boundaries between homosocial and homosexual desire. This is a recurring theme in Barrie’s contributions to the *Nottingham Journal* and the *Edinburgh Evening Dispatch* and is also central to the sketches on bachelorhood and smoking collected in *My Lady Nicotine*. Like that volume, the *Home Chimes* sketch contains an inside joke, for one of the men whom Hubbard claims as his husband is named Thomas L. Gilmore. This is an obvious reference to Thomas Lennox Gilmour, a close friend from Nottingham who moved to London in Spring 1885. The reacquaintance clearly sparked Barrie’s fancy, and at the time of the sketch’s publication the two men were living in adjoining rooms.

The idea behind the sketch is that Hubbard is the real husband of the men now married to his three sisters because he composed on their behalf the love letters that clinched the betrothments. He humorously maintains that, as it were *his* words that did the wooing, the three men fell in love with his sentiments and owe themselves to him: ‘as I wrote them while she only copied them’, he writes of one sister’s story, ‘it is plain that, though this mixes things a little up, it was John Hubbard to whom he ultimately made an offer of the hand which Jenny Hubbard accepted.’ The conceit only gradually emerges, however, allowing the sketch to open with an apparently alarming pronouncement:

Not five minutes ago a pair of horses with their ears in white clattered away from our door and round the corner. The last glimpse I had of Thomas L. Gilmore, my husband of an hour, he was assisting a blushing young lady who calls me brother into the wedding coach. … Legally Jenny is his wife, but morally he was pledged to me. Though I am of the male sex I have little doubt that I could get damages out of him for breach of promise of marriage.

The humorous tone means that the words are more preposterous than shocking, and Hubbard quickly emerges as one of Barrie’s foolish sentimentalists: ‘When the rumble of the wheels died away, I did not return to the wedding breakfast. There was something distasteful to me now, and I felt that the congratulatory toasts would fall fulsomely on my ear.’ The sketch turns on a characteristic Barrie scenario where a narrator pretends that he can substitute reality with art. Like the narrator of *The Little White Bird* (1902), Hubbard maintains that the invented sentiments he writes in the letters are real, and he indulges in the emotions that attach themselves to the fictional life he has built for himself: ‘a rush of thoughts, too turbulent for utterance, well up to my mouth as I take my last look of a husband who must never know me.’

Hubbard’s spurious claims to wedlock are undermined by these sentimental turns of phrase, and the consummate way in which he maintains his fantasy persuades the reader that he is anything but self-deluded. As in his later fiction and plays, Barrie’s mode of fantasy has the effect of unsettling – or queering – social and moral codes. When Hubbard reimagines his first introduction to Gilmore through the words he invented for the benefit of his sister, his prose drifts into fantasy: ‘It is natural that one should dwell fondly on his first meeting with his third husband. I still feel Thomas L. Gilmore taking my hand in his, and holding it a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.’ Within the frame of make-believe, homosexual desire is here safely laid out on the pages of a penny Victorian newspaper.

The best of Barrie’s contributions to *Home Chimes*, however,was the last he made to the paper’s weekly format: ‘The Body in the Black Box’, a gruesome horror story issued in the Christmas number (26 December 1885). The story is an innovative variation on the traditional theme of the doppelgänger which has its roots in German romantic literature, especially the stories of E.T.A. Hoffman. As it developed in the nineteenth century, in tales such as Edgar Alan Poe’s ‘William Wilson’ (1839) and Fyodor Dostoevsky’s ‘The Double’ (1846), the doppelgänger theme typically portrays an internal psycho-drama taking place within the mind of the central character, who is often the narrator. James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1829) is an early example of this tradition. The theme was picked up by later Victorian writers including Robert Louis Stevenson whose *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was published precisely two weeks after ‘The Body in the Black Box’.

The story begins arrestingly:

The first time I saw him I made up my mind to kill him. I never knew his name. I had been in every street in London that day, every day and night that week, and no one had spoken to me. All the others had people to speak to. There was only one face I knew.

That face is the narrator’s shadow, but he does not recognise it as part of himself. He watches it in a shop window drawing comfort from the way it responds to his movements: ‘It was the only thing that took any notice of me.’ Barrie would of course return to the idea of the shadow as a dissociated part of a being in *Peter Pan*. Here the idea appears to set up a conventional psychological pattern of split personality. Devoid of human interaction, the narrator projects his fears and longings onto an illusory form which he fails to recognise as a hidden part of himself – the Jungian shadow that houses the dark, unconscious region of his personality. When he is irritated by a smiling young man in a shop, the narrator notices that his shadow ‘trembled all the time, and looked at me as if it wanted me to take its part.’ When the man mocks him for being frightened of his own shadow, the narrator resolves to kill him. The conscious man does indeed seem to have taken up his shadow’s part.

As with all good horror stories, however, this is a tale where the precise events that take place are unclear and the burden of interpretation is thrown back onto the reader. By the end of the story we are no longer certain that the narrator is a ‘conscious’ being at all. He shadows the young man around London for several days and nights, following him to his lodgings and his place of work and observing him when he visits the home of a young woman. Eventually he chooses the moment to kill him, strangling him until ‘his eyes fell out’, and shoving his body into a coffin – the black box – that stands against the office wall. He then assumes the man’s identity, taking up his position as an insurance clerk and marrying his fiancé. Fantastic elements of the narrator’s story – he claims to eat his clothes and to have been wandering about London for a thousand years – convince us that he is either mad – or something else?

The story concludes with a statement about the discovery of the manuscript we have just been reading – a common trope of the Gothic genre – and some remarks from a landlady which throws into question the ‘whole’ identity of the two men. In a startling twist to the tale we begin to suspect that the narrator and the young man may be the same person. The manuscript is found in the young man’s lodgings, but the landlady’s description of her lodger reveals features and characteristics of both men. Significantly, we are told that this lodger ‘used to sit by the fire staring straight before him, and from his reflection in the cheval glass above it she sometimes saw him laughing to himself.’ On the mantelpiece there is a small black box. It is the young man’s laughter that first prompts the narrator to kill him, and after he is dead he twists his lips into a smile. Are we meant to conclude that the split personality belongs to the young man and that narrator is this man’s shadow – his unconscious dark side which seeks to suppress the laughing, smiling side of his personality into the black box?

In *Dr Jekyll* and other tales of the doppelgänger the shadowy double is presented as a projection of the central character’s unconscious or repressed desire, and of his internal struggle against himself and the society to which he belongs. Strikingly, however, Barrie turns this theme on its head by presenting the story from the perspective of the double – the shadow self that in most stories never gets to tell its tale. After he closes the coffin lid on his victim, the narrator describes how he ‘put on his coat, and sat down on his stool and began to write.’ In both Hogg’s *Confessions* and Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll* the evil double attempts, but fails, to seize control of the narrative. Barrie’s double, by contrast, does succeed in taking over the identity of the young man (who remains silent throughout the tale) and in writing his life. There is no room in this 3,000-word sketch for Barrie to develop the kind of moral theme we find in Stevenson, Dostoevsky and others, but its inversion of the traditional form of the tale of the doppelgänger is a brilliant piece of literary invention.

There is insufficient space here to do full justice to this neglected story. The only commentator to have noticed it is the biographer Lisa Chaney who reaches a frankly ludicrous conclusion by taking an interpretative leap that would be extraordinary were it not so characteristic of Barrie criticism. Chaney states, without evidence or explanation, that the story was ‘refused by the publishers’ – it is not clear which publishers this refers to – and concludes that it is more than just a ‘youthful flirtation’ with the doppelgänger theme: ‘Here Barrie is speaking about himself, about his own shadowy identity. Jamie, the little boy, is searching for a reflection of himself in his mother’s eyes. But his mother, the one who matters most, doesn’t see him’.[[5]](#footnote-5) It is remarkable to what lengths some commentators are prepared to go to reduce everything Barrie wrote to his relationship with his mother and the incident of his brother’s childhood death. The tale was plainly written as a chilling horror story for the Christmas number of a weekly magazine. And like the other contributions to *Home Chimes*,it demonstrates the inventiveness and resourcefulness of Barrie’s literary mind. Until we abandon shallow notions of trauma and the unconscious and acknowledge that Barrie was a writer fully engaged with the literary culture of his day, and fully responsive to the many forms and modes available to him as an artist, we will continue to belittle his achievements as a writer.

1. Denis Mackail, *The Story of J.M.B.* (London: Peter Davies, 1941), pp. 115, 123, 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Jerome K. Jerome, *My Life and Times* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926), p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J.A. Hammerton, *Barrie: The Story of a Genius* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1929), p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mackail, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lisa Chaney, *Hide and Seek with Angels: A Life of J.M. Barrie* (London: Hutchinson, 2005), p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)