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Janet Dunbar. *J. M. Barrie: the man behind the image*. Boston. Houghton Mifflin Co. 1970. 413 pp. \$8.95.

Long overdue for review in this journal is Janet Dunbar's 1970 life of J. M. Barrie, the first full-scale biography of the Scottish novelist and dramatist in nearly thirty years. Denis Mackail's "official" biography, *Barrie: The Story of J.M.B.*, came out in 1941, having been undertaken at the request of Barrie's literary executors, Lady Cynthia Asquith and Peter Davies. Since then only one book, Cynthia Asquith's personal reminiscences (*Portrait of Barrie*, 1954), is of major biographical importance.

To prepare her life of Barrie, Miss Dunbar has used three important collections of material not previously available: Walter Beinecke's archive of Barrie materials, including letters, notebooks, manuscripts, and other memorabilia; Lady Cynthia Asquith's personal diaries of the nineteen years she was Barrie's secretary; and, most important of all, the Peter Davies collection of letters and papers. This controversial file of materials about Barrie's relationship with the Davies family was made available for the first time and "without conditions" (p. xi) to Miss Dunbar by Nicholas Davies, the last surviving member of the five Davies boys.

To uncover the psychological complexities of "the man behind the image," Miss Dunbar looks at Barrie's personality "in the light of his relationships with four women who influenced his life to a powerful degree: Margaret Ogilvy, Mary Ansell, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and Cynthia Asquith" (p. x). More than his public career, she concentrates on Barrie's inner life and relies heavily on the Davies papers and explanatory notes added later by Peter Davies, the son who always remained aloof from Barrie. The result makes fascinating reading and offers valuable insight into Barrie's personality problems. Yet the book is annoying from the scholar's viewpoint. We must accept Miss Dunbar's word about materials only she has seen. But she does not often document sources of biographical details about Barrie's life not included in the special collections she examined. To corroborate facts with Dunbar's presentations of them has required hours of searching in earlier biographical studies. Sometimes the hunt was fruitless; other times Miss Dunbar adjusted her sources to fit her thesis. In order to see how she develops her characterization of Barrie, let us look more closely at her treatment of the four women in his life.

The first and probably the most important influence on Barrie's life was his mother. For the early years Dunbar seems to rely primarily on Barrie's memoir of his mother, *Margaret Ogilvy*, and Mackail's standard biography. *Margaret Ogilvy*—Barrie's mother was always called by her maiden name—is a strange, sentimental unburdening by the son of his mother's strong-willed influence on him. It was written after her death and was so open about their relationship that some Scottish reviewers were offended when it came out. When Barrie was six years old, his mother's favorite son, David, then thirteen, died in an ice-skating accident. From then on, young James became a substitute for the lost son and spent hours in his mother's sickroom listening to stories of her childhood and making up storybook fantasies.

Like Mackail before her, Dunbar is, no doubt, correct in crediting this close relationship with creating in Barrie a dichotomy between the world of sentimental fantasy—associated with his home and often portrayed in Barrie's works—and the realities of the world outside. At the start of his writing career, Barrie knew no woman well but his mother. When he needed to create "flesh-and-blood women, Margaret Ogilvy took charge. They came out of his pen as romantic, self-possessed, sexless beings, set apart from common humanity, completely unreal" (pp. 53-54). Eventually Miss Dunbar applies the terms of this description to Barrie's view of two women he idolized in his adult life: Sylvia Davies and Cynthia Asquith.

First, however, Dunbar discusses Barrie's unsuccessful marriage with the beautiful and passionate Mary Ansell, whom he courted for more than three years without suggesting marriage. Why not? Here Dunbar's conjectures are on shaky ground. From his mother's influence, Barrie viewed love as romantic worship, not sexual desire. Since "there is no evidence that any woman had ever excited him in the way other men were excited by attractive women" (p. 107), Dunbar contends that Barrie lacked virility and never consummated the marriage. As evidence she quotes a passage from Barrie's sentimental novel, *Tommy and Grizel*, and several ambiguous letters from Mary to H. G. Wells written at the time of her divorce from Barrie in 1909 (I have been unable to discover the source of the letters, as usual not identified by Dunbar). In neither instance is the question of impotence resolved: gleaning biography from fiction and reading facts into obscure letters are dangerous practices in a biographer.

The reasons for Mary's divorce after fifteen years with Barrie are easier to find than speculating about impotence. Mary had fallen in

love with a young, handsome barrister and literary man named Gilbert Cannan, whom she married after the divorce was final. Besides, Barrie had become more devoted to Sylvia Davies and her family than he was to Mary. Indeed, *Peter Pan*, his chief claim to literary fame, was written for the Davies boys in 1904.

Janet Dunbar speaks of Barrie's connection with the Llewelyn Davies family as "the most extraordinary period in James Matthew Barrie's life" (p. 135). It is the key to her biography and represents her main contribution to Barrie studies, based on the rich lode of Davies papers. One example will illustrate how Miss Dunbar uses these materials to go beyond earlier biographies. After meeting the Davies family in 1897, Barrie became a constant visitor to their home near his own in London, telling stories to the boys and doing favors for the mother. In 1904 Arthur Davies moved the family out to Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire. Without giving credit, Dunbar draws on Mackail for the reasons: Arthur was becoming prosperous at the bar and there was a good private school there for the older boys.

Yet Miss Dunbar adds another advantage as far as Arthur is concerned: "Mr. Barrie was not likely to pay so many calls" (p. 166). The suggestion of Arthur's jealousy over Barrie's too fond friendship with his wife—Barrie called her "My dear Jocelyn," the only person ever to address her by her middle name—grows out of personal remarks by Peter Davies appended to letters from Barrie to Sylvia. On two occasions Peter commented that his father was not pleased about trips Sylvia took with the Barries. Dunbar consistently takes at face value opinions like these from Peter Davies—granted they make good reading—and uses them to interpret the actions of Barrie and others.

Arthur Davies died of cancer in 1907, and Barrie took over much of the Davies family finances. Commenting on this arrangement, Peter summarized his view of Barrie, which becomes Miss Dunbar's essential thesis:

When he was strongly attracted by people, he wanted at once to own them and be dominated by them, whichever their sex. . . . There's no denying that, from A.L.I.D.'s [Arthur's] death onwards, he did increasingly "own" S.L.I.D. [Sylvia] and her boys after his fashion. And S.L.I.D., a strong character herself, couldn't help dominating him. Later, I think, he achieved something of the same peculiar equilibrium with G.L.I.D. [George Davies, the oldest son], and much more so with M.L.I.D. [Michael, the fourth son—George and Michael were Barrie's acknowledged favorites], who, however, was beginning to show signs of restiveness by the time of his death.

The above is not a serious attempt to define the relationship between S.L.D. and J.M.B. To do that would be beyond my powers and is beyond the scope of this record. (pp. 206-07)

Ignoring Peter's warning about "these stray thoughts . . . erroneous as they very likely are" (p. 207), Miss Dunbar accepts this psychological interpretation of Barrie's inner self as fully serious and builds her whole book around it. In all, three women "dominated" Barrie: his mother, Sylvia, and Cynthia Asquith. And Barrie "owned" both of the latter two in acting repeatedly as a financial fairy godfather amidst their family monetary troubles.

When Sylvia Davies died in 1910, Barrie became the financial protector of the five Davies children, whom he called "my boys," although he was never officially their legal guardian. From the Davies papers and the Mackail biography, Dunbar shows that Barrie was especially possessive at first of "My dear George" and later of Michael. For instance, in much the same psychological terms as earlier, Peter Davies described Barrie's peculiar affection for George as "a dash of the paternal, a lot of maternal, and much, too, of the lover—at this stage Sylvia's lover still imperfectly merged into the lover of her son" (p. 267). Unfortunately both of these boys died young like their parents, leaving Barrie alone and deeply grieved. George was killed in 1915 during World War I, and Michael drowned in 1921 near Oxford.

By 1921, however, Cynthia Asquith and her family had entered Barrie's life in an almost parallel situation to the earlier Davieses. In his usual way, Barrie loved the children, adored the wife without any suggestion of sexual intimacy, and aided the family with money. Bebe Asquith, like Arthur Davies, did not like the excessive attention Barrie paid to Cynthia; yet he was not able to be financially independent of him. On one occasion when they rented their house in the summer for money, he and Cynthia had to move in with Barrie for a couple of months—a practice that Cynthia dubbed "cuckooing."

Barrie's modes of address to his secretary in letters remind us of his earlier attachment to Sylvia Davies. Dunbar quotes letters addressed to "Dearest Cynthia," "Darling Girl," and "Dearest Mulberry," and nearly always signed "Loving Master." For the rest of his life Cynthia watched over him, and he idolized her. It is not surprising that at his death in 1937 Barrie left the bulk of his estate—which amounted to more than 170,000 pounds—to his faithful and beloved secretary of nineteen years.

Given this wealth of suggestive materials, it is hard not to agree with the psychological picture of J. M. Barrie depicted by Peter Davies and adopted by Miss Dunbar. Indeed, this biography adds much valuable primary material to our understanding of this lonely little man whose personal life was a mixture of fact and fantasy. In the future it will probably become a biographical source for fresh interpretations of Barrie's works. Yet at times Miss Dunbar seems to adjust the already known facts of Barrie's life to fit her heavy-handed Freudian view of his personality, suggested tentatively by Peter Davies. And because she refuses to document her materials, it is difficult to check up on her accuracy in the use of information. Herein lies the main fault with the book. As it stands, it is an important popular biography but a flawed piece of biographical scholarship. If all of its conjectures had been convincingly proven, it would have been a major achievement in Scottish literary biography.

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