A Critical Evaluation of Philip Barry's Plays

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A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF
PHILIP BARRY'S PLAYS

being

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The writer of this thesis wishes to express her appreciation for the help and encouragement given her by Dr. Ralph Coder and by Dr. F. B. Streeter.
To my mother

and father.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although there is not a great deal of biographical material available about Barry, these few facts may help to introduce the playwright to the reader. Philip Barry's family is Roman Catholic, his father and grandfather having come from Ireland. Born June 18, 1896, in Rochester, New York, he received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale University in 1919 and, in that same year, became connected with the American Embassy in London. Later, he returned to the United States, took additional work at Harvard University, where he became associated with the famous Harvard Workshop in dramatics, and there began his career as a playwright. Another interesting observation to be made at this point because of its influence on themes used in Barry's plays is the fact that he spends his winters on the Riviera, there absorbing cosmopolitan atmosphere so outstanding in his dramatic productions. 1

With this dearth of biographical material, the study of Barry's plays will necessarily be limited to ideas, influences, and backgrounds that reflect little of his personal life. However, this investigation has come

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1. Dilly Tante, Editor; Living Authors; a Book of Biographies, pp. 21-22.
about because of my interest in modern drama and because Philip Barry is one of the most discussed dramatists in contemporary life.

Barry is an interesting figure for consideration for several reasons: he has had more plays produced outside New York than any other modern playwright except Eugene O'Neill, and yet his failures are more significant than his successes; he has few plays to his credit which are both popular and important. One of Barry's plays, *The Philadelphia Story*, had a very long stage run, and later was made into a movie, proving that the playwright has the stuff from which successes are made. Why others of the writer's plays have not become equally successful will be given consideration here.

Another reason for my choice of Barry in preference to some other modern playwright is that he has produced enough plays to give an adequate sampling of ideas and methods for use as basis for conclusions. Since the plays incorporate a great variety of themes, they are classified arbitrarily, for more careful analysis, into four general groups; the plays with social themes, those with psychological themes, those with religious themes, and finally those which deal with no one of these, which are placed under the heading of plays with miscellaneous themes.
Determining what the modern audience apparently likes in Barry's plays may help to show the general modern taste in drama through consideration of the themes, plots, characterization, setting, and style employed. In order to accomplish this end, I have made my research to consist of studying and analyzing a majority of Barry's plays, reading all the available critical material on his plays and on the author himself, looking up production statistics to see how popular the plays were at the time they were produced, and studying all available biographical material on Barry to see what effect his surroundings have had on his writing. Since no critical volumes are available on this playwright's works, this thesis may give the reader at least a "look-in" on the type of drama he produces.
CHAPTER II

THE PLAYS AND THEIR THEMES

In order that the reader may understand later references to specific plays and incidents in them, a brief synopsis of each play will be given here, incorporating a bit of the plot, the main characters, and the theme employed.

Psychological Themes

In the first grouping, plays with psychological themes, are placed *Hotel Universe* and *Here Come the Clowns*.

*Hotel Universe* has its scene on the terrace of a villa on the French Riviera. Several young people visiting Ann Field, a married couple among them, are talking before they depart for Paris. The villa where Ann and her father live has once been a hotel and is said to have the power to appear to everyone as some other place important in his past experience and, in the eyes of an inmate, to turn one person into another dear to his memory. Ann's father is a sort of madman, the relic of a genius in physics. Through his supernatural powers of insight, a form of psychoanalysis, he is able to bring about catharsis for each character; that is, he enables him through introspec-
tion, to free himself from present unhappiness by facing his past experience squarely. All the characters except the young married woman, whose release is in maternal life which frees her from disaster, are filled with disillusionment and variations on the theme of suicide. The first part of the play is taken up with the characters' relationship to one another, their quips and cracks, and their various attitudes toward suicide and the desirability of death. The rest of the play exhibits the father's powers and insights. There is a sequence of scenes where he carries each character back to a former experience, now inhibitive and destroying, and releases him from the fear and unhappiness the person now connects with his past.

The play may mean that the wound from many an experience would be healed, if we could relive it in the light of more adult experience. It is sprinkled with little epigrams, fresh retorts, wisecracks, and the trick of two characters' suddenly beginning to act a little dialogue or number of their own. Barry tries to deliver an extremely hazy message (perhaps the one above) and succeeds only in revealing what an ill exchange he makes when he trades the clear good sense of his wit, with which his more successful plays sparkle, for pompous platitudes of a sentimental mysticism. Every incident loses its outlines because it is swathed in fuzzy verbiage about Life, Death,
the Great Beyond, and the fact that "somewhere it is always dawn."

Here Come the Clowns has as its hero Dan Clancy, who is an Irishman and a Catholic. Once a stagehand at James Concannon's Globe Theater, he has lost his job, his money, and the sight of one eye. His child has died, and his wife has left him. He is convinced that somewhere there must be an answer to the question of good and evil, and that God will tell him, if he can but reach Him. How Clancy finds not God, but the power of evil masquerading as an Illusionist among the misery-ridden denizens of Ma Speedy's Café des Artistes, and how the Illusionist makes each person present tell the truth about himself to his own greater sorrow and ultimate undoing, form the plot of the play. By clever questioning he makes each character ferret out the truth of some matter about which that person has long wondered, thus causing the truth to make the character more unhappy than if he had been left his uncertainty. In the end Dan Clancy is killed when the press agent, Dickinson, tries to destroy the Illusionist who endeavored to take on the attributes of God. With the hand of death on his shoulder, Dan finally sees and proclaims the Truth and the Way.

Barry does not seem to distinguish between misfortune and evil in this play, and his solution of the general
problem is not clear. There is something wrong in the fact that the reader, a mere ordinary mortal supposed to see so little, is constantly seeing ahead of this all-seeing and seemingly endless power of the Illusionist. The trouble with the play is that the author mistakenly supposes that the lives he is portraying seem more, rather than less, interesting and significant when they are "explained" in accordance with his intellectual scheme. When Barry attempts to sum up the allegory of good and evil in words, and to affirm man's redemption through his own powers of godliness, it is too plainly the author, not the characters, speaking. His clumsy preaching and explicitness shatter a mood whose strength lies in the eerie, wordless power of suggestion. Barry's purpose is perhaps to show that truth does not always make one free, that it enslaves as well as liberates, and that God alone knows the why of a situation.

Religious Themes

There are three plays placed in the religious classification, but they are vastly different as to plot, and are religious in three very different ways. The first, *John*, is the biography of John the Baptist. The second, *The Joyous Season*, is centered around the figure of a nun, whose homecoming brings about needed reform within her
family. The last is religious only in that it is a modern version, with many changes, of a Biblical story, that of Elisha's visits to the Shunemite woman (II Kings, chapter 4). It is entitled Tomorrow and Tomorrow.

John is a reverently conceived historical drama of the fiery prophet of the wilderness and his relationship to Jesus. It is concerned with the tragedy of the personal failure of John the Baptist. John, a man with passionate force and narrow limitations, is fated to be the instrument for achievement of a purpose which he is incapable of understanding. A nationalist, a man of violence, and preeminently the prophet of a revengeful God, he does not have within the compass of his soul the ability to comprehend that Messiah whose advent he has been foretelling. He has seen Jesus and liked him, but it has been so impossible for the two men to know one another that when John, in prison, is told of the new turn-cheek doctrine preached by his erstwhile disciple, he can only set it down as a malicious lie. Though at the moment of death he knows Jesus is the Messiah, he goes to death gladly only because he is sure that the new leader will have the adulteress, Herodias, stoned, as the law commands, and will wield again the warlike might of the Jews.

Not only is the conception intellectually interesting, but it has the stuff of great tragedy in it. John
is the large but imperfect man of whom Aristotle spoke, and death, coming on him in a moment of exaltation, affords a tragic situation, one which coincides with a moment of internal triumph. The man dies in full possession of his soul, knowing that he has not failed for himself. Because John can accept death gladly, the reader accepts it with an exaltation which makes the situation genuinely tragic.

The play fails not because of Barry's lack of spiritual insight, but because he hasn't been able to manage the narrative. The story will not move forward; the long, meandering first act barely introduces the subject; the second is concerned with irrelevant affairs in the home of Tetrarch; and the concluding scene is too short more than to suggest how effective the play might have been.

The Joyous Season is concerned with a newly-fashionable Boston family, Irish Catholics, who have drifted from their childhood simplicity to affluence, and away from faith. Once they lived joyously close to the soil on the Merrimac River estate of their parents. Now they have moved to Beacon Street and have become a disgruntled pack of sophisticateds. The play begins with the arrival of their sister, Christina, who, years ago, scandalously ran away to enter a convent, and who has not been seen since. Her appearance proves most disturbing
to the smug complacency of most of the large family, dwelling in communal stuffiness in a pretentious town house. Their errant sister, now a Mother Superior, alone retains the keen buoyancy of youth. During her stay from Christmas Eve until Christmas afternoon, she awakens their realization that they have souls—an amazing revelation.

The cheerful nun who flutters in and out is a pleasant person, but she is neither sufficient to carry a play, nor does she constitute a very telling argument in favor of the church. The play is pious comedy from which the wit has been almost entirely omitted. The author neither presents the situation with bold simplicity nor makes it psychologically convincing, and the drama meanders until the last few moments, when the reader suddenly realizes that everybody has been transformed without understanding very clearly the why or wherefore.

For the setting of Tomorrow and Tomorrow Barry goes to a small Indiana college town to reconstruct in modern terms the Old Testament story of Elisha and the Shunemite woman, the son that he gave her, and the restoration of his life to her by a miracle of prayer. In an old house, somber and melancholy, is played Barry's story of the mediocre, affable husband, his wife, and the visiting psychiatrist, who, as the father of her child, gives to her life the beauty and purpose of which it has been
barren, and who, after an interval during which the child grows to be almost eight years old, returns to save him by a wonder of psychiatric understanding. He cannot take a lifelong responsibility for the mother or child as the husband does, since his first duty is to his work, and he is strongly devoted to it; he can only come and go. The husband has the woman and the child at the close of the play, while the psychologist goes back to his eternally-maladjusted life, leaving the woman in love with him.

The best parts of the play are comedy, but Barry is laboring under the handicap of being conscious most of the time that he is writing an extraordinary, serious play. He has aimed at austerity and brevity which turn out to be unnatural, and he hardly improved upon the Biblical story by substituting an itinerant lecturer on psychiatry for the prophet, a carnal love affair between the lecturer and wife of his host for Elisha's fruitful prayers, and a brief, psychoanalytic treatment, about eight years later, for the prophet's miracle in behalf of the child.

The play is well written, but shows topsy-turvy-dom of spiritual values. It seems that the essential disloyalty of Barry's characters, the more pronounced because it brings no qualms, is hardly a thing to be held up for sympathy and admiration.
Social Themes

By far the majority of Barry's plays fall into the social theme grouping, though the plays have a great variety of plots.

You and I is the story of a business man who has once sacrificed an artistic career on the altars of love and experience, and is determined his son shall not follow in his footsteps.

This play displays Barry's most valuable talents. It is well made; it boasts sparkling, witty dialogue; it presents characters who can be differentiated and distinguished in American society; and it puts into their mouths with facility and truth the words that such Americans really speak.

The Youngest deals with a family of the upper strata of society who are suddenly reformed from subjecting the youngest member of the family to all sorts of insults and lack of consideration, when they learn that by his father's will, he is given complete control of their destinies through the inheritance of the family wealth.

The Youngest is less characteristic of its author than the rest of his social comedies, and it is not a very effective excursion into American domestic comedy because of the lack of plausibility of plot.

In a Garden is a thesis play attacking the epi-
grammatic generality, "Every woman is the potential mistress of her first lover," and is developed when the husband endeavors through creating, by means of stage scenery, the garden where his wife and her first lover found the passion of young love, to prove to himself, to his wife, and to the former lover that the love is long since dead. The sensitive and spontaneous wife has lived under the domination of her playwriting husband who sees all life, including his own, in strict terms of the theater, until she revolts against it. Her husband analyzes his own romance at the moment it is taking place; he sees his wife as a character in a play and stages her accordingly, for the jovial purpose of discovering her reactions and of proving how perfect is his knowledge of human emotions. He knows no one as a human being.

In the end the wife, failing to bring her husband to terms with reality, leaves, and the dismayed playwright vents his amazement in pulling down the flowers of the garden set constructed to further his domestic experiment.

The play shows one of Barry's major weaknesses, his tendency to lay the whimsical humor on too heavily. There is little spontaneity, and Barry shows the same bookish quality in his play that he derides in the husband. There is no illusion at all of reality.

In White Wings Barry restates the age-worn fight
between the progressive and conservative spirits, choosing as his representatives of the old order, the Inches, a proud family of street cleaners who for years have followed the horses—with a broom. As his radicals he selects the Todds, the first motorists, whose horseless buggy came quite naturally as a threat to the dependent livelihood of the Inches. In it is a love story of the horse-loving White Wing and the daughter of the motor-minded Todds told with a bizarre modernistic symbolism.

The plot seems too slim to bear the weight of four long acts. It repeats itself, and runs thin of complications. The poetic quality comes so much to the fore that this fact alone would probably account for lack of commercial success.

Paris Bound states through its plot that marriage is a much greater thing than the merely physical relationship of man and wife, that the companionship of years and the responsibility toward children should not be discarded in an instant, and that the marriage union should be maintained in spite of infidelity. In brief, it is the story of the lives of two young married people. One is unfaithful once, and the other is on the point of being so, but they survive through certain happy devotion and common sense.

This play was an extremely successful light comedy,
and gives a true picture of upper-class society. It has a certain charm, and in it Barry uses a comedy device quite as boringly as does contemporary society—that of having his characters use expressions which have been made into cliches by others. The comedy has a substantial texture, and resolves its final comic surprise, its conclusion, with genuine originality and tenderness.

In *Holiday* there is an American home, with money, family, and a father who is very much the head of the house, determined to have his own way with everyone around him. Julia, his older daughter, is definitely his kind, while Linda, a second daughter, has lately wakened to the boredom of such an existence, and brings disquieting notions into the house. The son, Ned, is driven by the half-conscious realization of the same thing and by his father's tyranny, to more and more drink. Johnny Case, self-made, in love with Julia, has resolved to depart from business and enjoy life while he can, and plans to work when he is too old to do anything else. The story wells up through parental objections, variations on Johnny's ability to stick to his guns, Julia's remoteness from what is in Johnny's mind, and on to the end where Johnny and Linda's future can be surmised.

The dialogue is charming and rings true. Barry uses it effectively to build strong scenes where longer, more
emotional scenes are emphasized by contrast. The characters are full in content and wide in genuine variety. By reality of their natures, they become a part of the human struggle. The comedy is clean, swift, and high-spirited. Barry never strains an emotional point to sentimentality, and he creates a complete illusion of real human experience.

The central figure for The Animal Kingdom is Tom Collier, who has known the artists and has helped them with money and with wisdom toward them and their progress and creation. He has had a great friendship and a sort of side issue of a love affair with Daisy Sage, who is now abroad studying painting. Tom marries Cecilia, a lady of respectable society. He has a publishing business, which along with the rest of him, suffers from the lack of inspiration the new life and friends afford him. The attraction of his wife for him is a strong one, largely physical, and she persuades him further and further from his own direction. He leaves her and goes back to Daisy, who since her return from abroad, will have him wholly or not at all.

The play has no coherent plot or problem, and arrives at no cosmic conclusions. It skips along airily, draws contrast in character with agility, and steps across the borderline into tragedy without wasting a sentence.

The saint converted in The Philadelphia Story is
the daughter of the Lord family, a wealthy clan of Philadelphia aristocrats. Tracy is just embarking on her second marriage. Among those who wander in are Tracy’s divorced husband and two reporters, a man and a woman, from the magazine, *Destiny*. In the first act Tracy is beautiful, competent, and gay. In the second, her ex-husband reveals another angle of her character. He shows her to be an inhuman virgin goddess, or, as her father puts it, a married spinster. Sinless, she is the cause of sin in others. The visiting journalist puts things right by going on an early morning bender with her, a roll-in-the-moonlight which includes much champagne and a dip in the pool in a state of nature. The experiment, which Tracy has forgotten all about in the morning, redeems her, as she learns for the first time how down-to-earth people think and live. The wedding takes place, but the bride-groom changes. It is the first husband who takes over.

Not one character in the play really comes to life, but there is high comedy in several of the scenes. It is smart, gossipy, and wisecracking. The main concern of the play is to illustrate in terms of character and situation what is meant by refinement, integrity, and decency of soul.

The story of *Without Love* concerns on one side a woman who has had a brief, wonderful marriage, ended by
an accident, who has found nothing since to take the place of the great relationship. On the other side is a man who has gone through a devastating affair in Paris and has been left in the lurch with his economics, a heritage from his father's ministry to Ireland, and his plans for the affiliation of England, Ireland, and the United States in the pursuit of war. The two marry on a platonic basis, but in the end *amor vincit omnia*. There is the allegory of a marriage of convenience between two people and two nations (England and Eire).

The play suffers from a divided duty—its personal story and its political plot. Barry's humor and understanding, his steady progress from event to event help to sustain the play, but he is unable to shed the velvet of upper-class society and his tendency to mistake manner for soul or mind is apparent.

**Miscellaneous Themes**

There are three plays, each so essentially different that they fall into no particular classification, so they are placed in a miscellaneous grouping.

*Spring Dance* is concerned with a beautiful senior girl in love with a young man who fancies himself singular in feeling that marriage is a handicap to the ambitious male. He is about to be off on a vague exploration of
Russia, but when he seems to have difficulty in making any goodbye final, classmates of the heroine form a plan to bring him to his senses, and she "gets her man."

The play is devoid of suspense, and relies for interest upon a picture of college life which labors between realism and satire. The men characters, all of whom are undergraduates but a lonely college professor, are well stocked with charm and witty sayings, and the most notable quality about the girls is their idiom. The entire play is pleasant rather than plausible.

**Liberty Jones** is an allegory about democracy and its dangers. Liberty Jones is very ill in the home of her Uncle Sam, an amiable but confused business-man. She is menaced by Three Shirts of Brown, Black, and Red hues, who keep appearing on the balcony outside. No remedy for her has been found by four pompous doctors—Law, Divinity, Medicine, and Letters. At length, Liberty is raised from her sickbed, loved, and defended by Tom Smith, a very high-flying aviator.

The play is simple and childish in the best sense, but allegory is scattered about so plentifully that one is not sure just how far he ought to exercise ingenuity in discovering meanings. In many places **Liberty Jones** seems stilted, and Barry fails to establish one dominant tone in the whole play.
Cock Robin is the only play in which Barry has collaborated with another playwright. For this production he worked with Elmer Rice, and the result was a play vastly different from anything else Barry has written. The play is a murder mystery with a revenge motif. The age-old device of the play within a play is employed, rather successfully, and the murder is committed on the stage of the second play. There are moments of real suspense, as the reader successively suspects one and then another of the characters, as many of them have a motive for committing the murder, and the surprising thing is that the murderer is exonerated for his crime.

The play gives a fresh treatment of an old plot, and is well planned, affording dialogue commensurate with the other aspects of the play.

Here, in brief, are the plays in review. From this overall view of Barry's work, one can readily see what a variety of writing the playwright has produced, and can see possible reasons for the wide diversity of acclaim with which his plays have been accepted.
CHAPTER III

MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE

A majority of Barry's plays depend on the mood or atmosphere created by use of music, flowers, inanimate objects, and even characters themselves for developing the theme. Much significance must be attached throughout these plays to the symbolism employed in order that the reader may catch the subtle changes and shades of meaning evident in a given play.

Music

Barry makes much use of music for a wide variety of purposes in his plays: In Here Come the Clowns the blatant piano music heard over the rest of the small dance orchestra brings to the reader a certain spirit of gaiety in contrast to the gloomy surroundings and the morbid mood set in Ma Speedy's speakeasy. When Connie and Clancy go up on the balcony to dance, the music escapes, as the door opens and closes, and the music-laden room on the other side of that door represents the early, bright existence of Clancy as a gay youth. When he enters it, it is almost as though he has returned to that youth, and on returning to "Ma's" and leaving the music behind, he is again enveloped in the misery of his present existence.
In *Holiday* the music coming up to the playroom where Linda stages a small private party, after the announcement party of larger proportions which she has planned for Julia has been taken over by her father, creates the effect of another world in progress downstairs, while upstairs Linda catches strains of the music which indicate the very pulse of the party. Linda's small music box upstairs plays the tunes of her childhood, and takes her pleasantly away from her present disappointments.

In *The Animal Kingdom* one of Tom's artist friends, Franc, contributes definitely to the doleful mood in which Daisy finds herself, after she learns that, by his marriage, Tom is lost to her. Franc's rendition of the morose German songs, indeed, helps the reader to catch the plaintive solitude Daisy experiences.

In *Hotel Universe* an unknown pianist who lives in a villa close to Hotel Universe practices a great deal, and his music makes a perfect background for the mental struggles experienced and revealed by the various characters in the course of the play.

Music plays its part in *The Joyous Season* by the family's singing a song well-known to them in their childhood, as a part of their Christmas Day celebration. The song helps every member of the family to realize what he has lost by leaving his former, happy, carefree existence
in favor of acquiring wealth and social position.

In Liberty Jones, wealthy in symbolism of all kinds, the lullaby sung to Liberty by her old Irish nurse while Liberty experiences a serious illness, recalls the girl’s childhood and helps to create an atmosphere of peace and rest which contributes to Liberty’s recovery. Another type employed in this same play is the radio music which emanates from Liberty’s bedside table. The music reflects characters, such as the “cluck-cluck” of Liberty’s society-conscious aunt and the heroine’s gradually strengthened heartbeat, as she recovers from her illness. It also provides suitable background for each scene—tempestuous music for the struggle between Smith and the Three Shirts and soft music for the love scene between Liberty and Smith.

Without Love employs piano music played by Pat. He first plays as a means of entertaining himself while he waits to meet Jamie, and he continues the same tune while they become acquainted. At the last of the play, when the two decide their marriage is not platonic, but is based on love, his piano playing accompanies their word-journey on a honeymoon which they have always planned, but never have taken.

The piano music played by Richard, the only man who even tempts Mary Hutton to be unfaithful to her husband,
in *Paris Bound*, is a stormy piece written by Richard for a ballet, but admirably reflecting the mental anguish experienced by Mary, as she is torn between her husband and Richard, and as she ponders the possibility of her husband's infidelity.

**Flowers**

Flowers play almost as important a part in Barry's plays as does music, and they aid greatly in producing or sustaining a particular mood. In *Here Come the Clowns* Clancy recalls that the long-identified "He" always wore a white carnation. The reader is left wondering, even at the close of the play, whether "He" is merely James Concannon, former owner of the Globe Theater when Clancy was a stage hand, or whether "He" might in some way refer to the Deity, since Clancy is making such a concerted effort to find him. The Illusionist, when making his appearance as Concannon in the last act, wears the white carnation in his lapel in keeping with the description given by various characters of the former proprietor.

*Hotel Universe* contains several references to hawthorn blossoms in connection with one couple concerned in the plot. Ann reveals that one day in a florist's shop while looking at hawthorn blossoms, she has a "hunch" that Pat is in trouble, and as the story unfolds, Pat tells
how his sweetheart in England has committed suicide under the hawthorn tree where they met, when Pat's father has discouraged the marriage between Pat and the English girl.

The House and Senate contribute purple and white lilacs respectively to Liberty Jones during her illness, and throughout the remainder of the play, the white and purple lilacs appear, though their purpose and significance is somewhat obscure to the reader. At a party given by Liberty's aunt, white and purple lilac bushes decorate the roof garden (Scene Three); in Scene Four purple and white lilac bushes are found in the park; and in Scene Five the bridesmaids for Liberty's wedding carry bouquets of white and purple lilacs.

In Tomorrow and Tomorrow laurel blossoms are emphasized. Eve Redman relates to Dr. Hay, the psychologist, the effect laurel produces on her:

... When I was fifteen, my first summer here, there was one very bright night, and I went walking by myself. All at once I came upon the bank of laurel. It was—I can't tell you. I've never known beauty like it, before or since.---I think it was the first time I ever felt myself alive. But when I could, I ran from it. I haven't been back there since—not at that time of year.

When Hay departs, he brings a bouquet of laurel to Eve as a symbol of the love they have shared during a sojourn together to the river bank she has described.

1. Philip Barry, Tomorrow and Tomorrow, p. 54.
In the same play Barry builds atmosphere for each scene by suggesting different types of flowers as a part of stage setting. If the scene is a happy one, gay spring flowers are used; if the mood and season have changed to a more somber tone, the flowers are of duller hues, and in Act III, scene 2 in which the serious illness of Eve's son occurs, no flowers at all appear on the stage.

The same device of flowers being used in each scene is employed in *Without Love* to indicate mood and season. Their absence is conspicuous in Act III, scene 2 when Pat has left and Jamie is left alone, realizing that their marriage is not a platonic one. In this same drama, white violets also become symbolical of the French Paul Carrel who eventually causes Pat to become jealous enough to admit to himself and to Jamie that he really loves her. For dinner engagements which Jamie and Jarrel share during the platonic phase of Jamie's and Pat's marriage, Carrel always sends white violet corsages, as Jamie has expressed her preference for them over purple ones. When Pat returns unexpectedly from a tour of the United States, he immediately notes that Carrel is with Jamie by the presence of her head scarf and a bunch of white violets, carelessly tossed on the divan.
Characters

Even a character or group of characters become symbols in several of Barry's plays. In The Animal Kingdom the group of artists with whom Tom Collier associates until his marriage represent not only Tom's carefree past existence, but are also the only really alive, down-to-earth people in the play, as contrasted with Tom's wife and her society friends. The artists represent the class of people who know how to live and can place the proper value on persons and things.

In Holiday Julia and her father, as well as several of the minor characters, are representative of the class who have money as their god, and whose only aspiration is to gain more prominence on the social scale.

Liberty Jones affords symbolism in almost every character. Liberty herself is American liberty and freedom. Uncle Sam Bunting refers to the United States. Tom Smith is representative of the armed forces. The Four Doctors represent the academic solidarity of American educational principles, and the Three Shirts--Red, Brown, and Black--of course portray the three contenders for America. Several other characters' identities are somewhat obscure, but doubtless stand for something or someone in the playwright's mind. Such "revision" of names of guests at Liberty's party as John L. Green, William Lewis,
and Browl Erder is self-evident. Liberty's old Irish nurse, Maggie, killed in a plane crash when attempting to answer Liberty's call for help, comes, in spirit form, to her aid, symbolizing Ireland's ready moral support, even though the country is unable to provide actual aid with arms and men.

Inanimate Objects

Barry employs inanimate objects effectively in many of his plays to create an atmosphere or to contribute to a mood. In *Here Come the Clowns* as Clancy looks at Connie, friend of the wife who has deserted him, he imagines he sees Connie wearing earrings in pierced ears. In reality Connie is wearing no earrings at all, but as Clancy muses over his past, and finds comfort in Connie's companionship, he, for a moment, reverts to a brighter day in his life when he and Nora were happily married, and for a moment he sees Connie as though she were Nora, the earrings being a part of Nora's jewelry. At the end of the play when he learns how unfaithful Nora has been, he tells Connie he likes her better without the earrings.

Much in *Hotel Universe* may be considered allegorical or symbolical, but two things particularly stand out in the reader's mind. One is the beacon light from the lighthouse on the sea, as it flashes with intermittent
regularity over the porch of the French villa. This beam represents the flashes of insight the characters gain into their own past existence, as they are guided to a fuller understanding of their present problems by Ann's father, the supposedly-demented former physicist. The other is a cock's crowing which in some way represents this old man's powers. When he goes for midnight strolls on the beach, the cock crows, and at the end, when all of the young people have secured a new lease on life as a result of the old man's efforts, the cock crows. Just before the final curtain, as Ann realizes her father is dead and not asleep as he sits in his chair, the cock crows again, and the curtain rings down.

Things also play an important part in Liberty Jones. The medicine provided by the Three Shirts with which Liberty's nurse keeps her in a near-stupor is discarded by Tom Smith, as he comes to rescue her, and when he pours all of the varieties of medicine together in a crystal vase, the mixture becomes successively red, white, and blue, signifying the overpowering of foreign tactics by the might of the American flag. When Tom asks the Three Shirts what they want of Liberty, they answer, "Tokens," and Tom immediately gives them the red ribbon from Liberty's hair, and her strand of pearls. These he throws to the three who immediately tear them to shreds, and divide them,
amid much argument and fighting, among themselves. This little scene well depicts what would have been America's destiny had it fallen under control of foreign might.

In the same play silver epaulets, formerly worn by Liberty's grandfather, which now adorn a huge portrait of this military gentleman, are worn by Tom Smith to Liberty's party. When Tom sees the need for action against the foreign powers, the epaulets become wings, and he flies off to perform his duty against them. Later Liberty defends these wings as Tom's friend, Dick Brown, begins to cut them off in order to be sure Tom stays on the ground, as she says:

Who dares attempt to destroy his living spirit? Who dares to cut the wings on which he leaves the ground? You will save me as you are, or I shall vanish from this earth! You hear?²

A cumbersome river boat is the mode of transportation to the Beyond in Liberty Jones, somewhat reminiscent of Charon's boat on the River Styx. Liberty's Irish nurse whose spirit arrives, even though she is killed in a plane crash on her way over from Ireland, is eventually called for in this boat, as are also Liberty's mother, who, given a brief reprieve from Death, comes to dance at her wedding; and Tom Smith, who is killed defending

². Philip Barry, Liberty Jones, p. 135.
Liberty, but dies happy, knowing that she is now able to take care of herself.

In *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* Eve plans a supper on Dr. Hay's last night in the Redman home. Eve's husband is unable to be there, so she and Hay dine alone, and the two candles on the table represent Hay and Eve. The candles are the kind that last forever, Eve says. When Eve tells him she cannot leave her husband, Hay starts to extinguish the candles, but Eve doesn't let him, as she wants their love to go on, even though she will not sever her marital bonds.

**Places**

In consideration of Barry's symbolism the last point noted is his use of places. Almost always Mr. Barry's people dodge the gossip, the prattle, and the malice of their parlors and flee to a room "up stairs" where the realities dare not enter. These attic rooms are their escapes, and their refuges from high comedy. Rich as these rooms are in their sentimental associations, they provide a ready-made setting for fantasy. The "up-stairs" room may, as in *Paris Bound*, be a music room on the top floor of the Hutton's town house in uptown New York, near the East River. It may, as in *You and I*, be an attic changed into a studio, in order for the husband, who has
been sidetracked from his desire to paint by the responsibilities acquired when he was married, to satisfy this desire after he has established himself in business. As in Holiday it may be the childhood playroom to which Linda resorts, when her plans for the announcement party for her sister are thwarted by her father. In In a Garden it is merely a room made over, relighted and redecorated for an experiment. Most of these retreats have for the characters the special virtues of that playroom in Holiday in the Seton's stuffy town house, where Linda wishes to give the announcement dinner, "Because the playroom's the one room anyone's ever had fun in!" "It has," explains Linda, "something to do with--when I was a child here--and this room--and the good times in it--and . . . Well, I tell you this room's my home. It's the only home I've got. There's something here that I understand, and that understands me. Maybe it's Mother."³

CHAPTER IV

BARRY'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Another outstanding characteristic of Barry's writing is his search, through various characters appearing in some of his plays, for truth. In some cases this search is plainly defined, and is definitely apparent, while in others, the search is stated merely through dissatisfaction with the status quo felt and rebelled against by certain characters.

Clancy, in Here Come the Clowns, has as his sole mission the discovery of truth. Defeated entirely in the pursuit of worldly accomplishment, he vents his uncertainty in the following lines:

I have to find Him! 'Tis a necessary thing to me. I have some things to ask Him which nobody else can answer. I know it is His will that things happen as they do, but I've come to a place where I have to know the reason for certain of them.—And I know I will.1

Pabst, the Illusionist, makes certain observations about Clancy's quest which Clancy immediately refutes:

Pabst: This seems not at all as strange to me as it appears to seem to you. A man searches for the Truth and calls it 'God'—why not? It has many names, and as many faces.

Clancy: --It has one; and that's the name and the face of God.2

1. Philip Barry, Here Come the Clowns, p. 97.
2. Ibid., p. 99.
Than Clancy states exactly the problem with which his mind is possessed:

You up there, why do You send such blank confusion upon the world? What's the earthly good of half the things that happen?—Things that on the face of them are blundering injustices with no sense nor purpose—what's the reason for them? Have You not said You'd come when we called You? Then where are You keeping Yourself?—What have You to lose by passing a moment or two with a man of Your own making in such unholy need of You? Can You not hear me? Then come to me! Come. 3

Though not all of Barry's characters achieve a definite answer to their problems, Clancy sums up his solution in this passage:

The proud will of Man is my answer! The free will of Man, turned the wrong way. By the grace of God, free to think and choose for himself, was he? Free to make his own world, eh? The fine job he's made of it! 4

In Holiday the problem confronting Johnny, Linda, and Ned is not so much the search for truth as it is dissatisfaction with their existence and their rebellion against it. Johnny, when he proposes retiring early in life and working when he is too old to do anything else, states the desire of each of the three: "I'm after—all that's in me, all I am. I want to get it out—where I can look at it, know it. That takes time.—Can't you under-

3. Ibid., p. 168.
4. Ibid., p. 187.
stand that?"5

Their unrest is rather difficult to define, and yet the reader feels in each of these characters deep-seated unrest and hatred for the life of "the idle rich" with its total lack of any motive or purpose, save money making.

Terry, one of the women in The Joyous Season, expresses the discontent felt by all other members of the family, and gropes blindly for improvement, though she knows not exactly what lies behind her unhappiness nor the exact remedy for it. As she confesses her longing and unrest to Christina, the nun, the reader feels the tension which is preying on her mind. She says of her husband:

He's not the man I married--he's nothing like him. Why should I care? I don't know what it is, but the air's full of something. Maybe there's someone else for him--I don't know. All I know is that there's something awful hanging over us. I do know that. --I feel it! I get some things out of the air myself--my thumbs prick too. I wish I could die. I want to die. How's that for instance? Oh, Christina--everything's so awful!"6

Her rebellion is later voiced, directly or indirectly, by all other members of her family, and it is only through the understanding of Christina that they are eventually put at ease, and are again restored to their former happy state of existence.

5. Philip Barry, Holiday, p. 128.

Hotel Universe includes several characters who are dissatisfied with their lot, but they are not searching for an intangible something never quite explained. Rather, they each retain some link with their respective pasts which has become inhibitive, and the old physicist, by showing them the truth of that happening, releases them from their uncertainty. Almost all of these characters find a solution to their problems merely by facing them squarely, but one of them, Tom, does make constant pilgrimages in the search for truth, seemingly never able to find it.

Stephen, the old physicist, reflects at great length on truth and its meaning, however, and his general statements seem applicable to all of the problem-laden characters:

I have found out a simple thing: that in existence there are three estates. There is this life of chairs and tables, of getting up and sitting down. There is the life one lives in one's imagining, in which one wishes, dreams, remembers. There is the life past death, which in itself contains the other. The three estates are one. We dwell now in this one, now in that—but in whichever we may be, breezes from the others still blow upon us.7. . . . One finds the pattern of his life, traced with the dreadful clarity of dream. Then he knows that all that comes in remains—nothing is lost—all is important . . . Here is the moon at last, you see? Here is our day's reflection, hung in space. Space is an endless sea, and time the waves that swell within it, advancing and re-

treating. Now and again the waves are still and one may venture any way one wishes. They seem to be still now—quite still. So which way will you go—where would you travel? At some time there is a soul born to every body—and like it, subject to many ills. But the soul's life is the only life there is, so the world is peopled with the living and with the dead. We know the living. Sometimes the dead deceive us.

When Tom, the searcher after truth, says he wants to do something, Stephen tells him that the strong should have strength not in the doing, but in the wish to do. He tells Tom he is here to suffer and to rejoice; to gain, to lose; to love and to be rejected; to be young, middle-aged, and old; to know life as it happens, and then to say, "This is it;" and that Tom is the sum of all his possibilities, all his desires—each faint impression, each small experience. When it is over, he will be what his spirit wants and takes of them, for life is a wish, and wishing is never over.

Lissa, the wife in In a Garden, shows her bitterness against life as she lives it in these lines: "I'm a character drawn with masterly skill. None of your human confusion is in my make up—I do nothing without point, significance—there's an idea behind me:"

8. Ibid., p. 109.
Later, Lissa shows by her comment to Norrie, her first lover, the uncertainty she experiences about life:

Are we in this room, Norrie. I mean—actually? Able to think, put words together, say what we want? Or are we just imagined, fixed for all time—making the same set gestures, speaking the same set lines—as we have in other performances?—As we shall in more to come...

Mr. Inch, Archie's father in White Wings, is the searcher for an answer to a problem. He goes about looking constantly for the "pretty life" which he has lost and compares disappointments in life with the photographer's, "See the pretty birdie," when there is never really any bird. Observing that he has hunted pretty birdies all through his life, and that he has found only sparrows wherever he has looked, he still continues his search.

Other characters such as Matey, the father in You and I, and James Hutton, Jim's father in Paris Bound feel a deep dissatisfaction and a disappointment in life, but these are readily explained, and do not contain the groping quest for an answer to an apparently unanswerable question. Matey is disappointed because he has had to forfeit a potential painting career due to an early marriage, and this has caused him to feel keenly the ungratified desire to become an artist, while James derives his disappointment in what life has given him from the fact

11. Ibid., p. 106.
that he and his wife are divorced after a brief marriage, thus depriving him of home and children.

This search for truth which provides the background for so many of Barry's plays may account for another characteristic of the playwright's dramas. The vast majority of his characters are relatively old, most of them being in their middle or late thirties, even though they belong to the young married set. Perhaps Barry feels that in order for a person to have enough insight into the meaning of life to question its plan, he must have lived longer and have experienced more than a person in his twenties usually does. These older sophisticates put their mark on a play, giving it the air of authority, since they have lived enough of life to endeavor to see it in a clear perspective and to derive a meaning from it.

Thus, this search for truth enhanced by more mature characters contributes greatly in the creation of atmosphere for which Barry is so outstanding. It lends an air of mystery, and brings vividly to the reader the relative insignificance of man, in the great plan of the universe, creating involuntarily in the reader a sort of awe of the great unknowns in our existence, bordering strongly on a lesson in religion.
CHAPTER V

BARRY, THE PLAYWRIGHT

After careful consideration has been given to a majority of Philip Barry's plays, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the playwright and his works and to formulate some general statements about him.

It seems that in several instances, Barry writes better closet drama than drama to be acted. With the unusual settings, rapid passage of time, whimsical plot, and difficulty of staging, White Wings is a better play to be read than acted. This is true also of Hotel Universe, for the whole plot is shrouded in mysticism, and such scene sequences as the characters' reverting to their childhoods or to previous happenings for a dialogue, would, indeed, be difficult to stage for complete comprehension by the audience. Liberty Jones affords so many subtle references and implications apparent to the reader which could easily be lost to the audience, that it, too, might also be considered closet drama.

Influence of Background

Several characteristics of Barry's writing crop up, which seem to reflect his background and personal life. The playwright's father and grandfather both came to
America from Ireland, and this fact may account for the generous sprinkling of Irishmen in the plays. In The Animal Kingdom two Irishmen, Joe Fisk, one of Tom's artist friends; and Regan, Tom's devoted butler and buddy, as well; appear. Here Come the Clowns boasts Irish Dan Clancy as its hero with the one desire to return to his beloved Connemara in Ireland before he dies. James Concannon, Dan's former patron, also is characterized as a kindly Irish gentleman. Every member of the family and all of the servants in The Joyous Season are of Irish descent, this fact partially accounting for their difficulty in adjusting to Beacon Street society, after having spent their early years in the tranquility of farm life. Maggie, Liberty Jones' old nurse, lends the Irish touch to that play, and enhances the plot greatly through her Irish lullabies which contribute definitely to the atmosphere, so essential in that drama. Without Love definitely smacks of interest in Eire, not only through the appearance of the Irish ambassador, Emmet Riordan, but through the plot itself which is an allegory advocating the "marriage" of England and Ireland.

Another characteristic apparently present because of Barry's background is his religious attitude. The fact that he is a Roman Catholic probably accounts not only for his centering an entire play, The Joyous Season,
around a nun, but also for his strong aversion to divorce noted in several plays. In *Paris Bound*, he seems almost to sanction adultery before he accepts divorce. In this play, disguised by the comic felicity of his dialogue and his seemingly unconventional point of view, he preaches a churchly sermon against divorce, basing it on the debatable idea that occasional infidelity is pardonable, when, and only when, a husband and a wife are truly in love, because then a mere physical transgression can have nothing to do with the real ties that bind them. Barry has opened himself to criticism by his method of handling the subject. The reasons he gives for maintaining the marriage union in spite of infidelity are, essentially, emotional reasons. He is writing for a mixed audience with highly varied moral standards, and for this reason it may be a part of his deliberate intention to seek a common ground for argument, but this leads him into an explanation of infidelity which seems to make light of the sin of adultery itself. When the writer tries to show that a man may be unfaithful to his wife, under stress of temptation, and at the same time remain a devoted husband deeply in love with her, he certainly treads on dangerous ground, and it is not surprising that the reader feels that Barry is justifying adultery on the grounds that it is not a very serious offence.
The last point noted in connection with the playwright's background is probably the result of his spending his winters on the French Riviera. This fact in all probability accounts in a large measure for Barry's liberal-minded, cosmopolitan attitudes toward such things as love, marriage, and drinking, as he treats them in the sophisticated society he portrays in his plays.

Dialogue

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of all of Barry's writing is his dialogue. Noteworthy in this connection are two very apparent facts: Barry depends almost entirely on short speeches to give his repartee the sparkle on which the humor in his plays is so dependent, and he employs very little profanity in his plays, a fact which is truly startling in this day and age when "anything goes" as far as modern drama is concerned.

Barry's dialogue is matchless. His unspoken dialogue is even better. He is a playwright who knows the full implications of a silence. He can so convey minor shadings of emotions with a delicate pliancy that they seem to heap meanings upon very minor incidents.

In his dialogue Barry shows himself to be fully possessed of the comic spirit. He is able to fill his stage, time after time, with people who, while they belong
in reality to this world, seem to be the gay property of a world of his own invention. To be sure, his characters look and act like other people, but in facing their problems they speak a joyous light-hearted language of their own which cannot only obscure the sheen on a familiar situation, but lift a fact above its cold realities and put it over into that realm of glorious nonsense of which only high comedy is capable. In this banter the writer takes for granted not only that the author and his readers are equals, socially and intellectually, but that they also share the capacity for laughing at the same thing, at the same time, and in the same way.

Barry gives his work a style that is his own by the glib but meaningful dialogue he puts into the mouths of his characters. It may be the game of preferences, played between the wife and her returned lover, which raises the second act of _In a Garden_ to memorability. It may be the patter of Ricky and Ronny, the young lovers in _You and I_, or that success saga spoken by Nick in _Holiday_. It may be the scene between Mary and Jim immediately after their wedding with which _Paris Bound_ opens; or the moment in _Hotel Universe_ in which three grown men discuss religion as if they were so many schoolboys. But in any case it is definitely stamped with the mark of its authorship.
The Failures

It is difficult to determine exactly what has caused so many of Barry's plays to be "flops" on Broadway, but by consideration of a few individual plays, perhaps the reader may see a reason for the lack of popularity some of them have undergone.

In John Barry sought in deep earnestness to evoke new values in the tragedy of John the Baptist. In his effort, however, to rationalize John's motives, he merely succeeds in destroying the stature of his central figure without enhancing the force of the tragedy. He also falls too often into the habit of modernizing the speech of many of the characters. There is no question that Barry feels the size and beauty of his theme. He fails only in the technique of execution, and in being unable to rid himself of a mental self-consciousness in his approach to the subject; he does not lose himself in the poetic power of his theme. He breaks away from his whimsical plays to attempt a serious biographical drama, but in spite of occasional beauty in his writing, it is an unsuccessful attempt which fails because it is too prone to waver between the grand manner of historical plays and the trivial informality of contemporary methods to achieve a coordinated style.
In *White Wings* Barry conceived a most hilarious and original, fantastic American comedy. He forgets the upper world of comedy and jubilantly descends into the lower world of travesty. Occasionally his tenderness gets the better of him, deadening the buoyancy of his writing and robbing the dialogue of its sparkle. It is in these moments when he turns mawkish and is inclined to let his whimsicality slip over into sentiment that Mr. Barry would do well to listen to the sound advice that his Mary gives the composer in *Paris Bound*. "Watch out," she says, "that your angel doesn't go whimsical on you." Perhaps Barry, too, should watch out!

These two faults, the overabundance of the whimsical and the sentimental, and the lack of complete grasp on certain of his plots are the traits accountable for nearly every one of Barry's failures, as shown by production statistics with *John* running for ten performances, *In a Garden* having a two-month run, and *White Wings* enjoying only a three-week stand.

Other reasons suggested for Barry's lack of acclaim are his mysticism, which he introduces in such plays as *Hotel Universe* which merely serves to leave the audience wondering and guessing; his attempt in one play, *Without Love*, to employ a political controversy as a part of the plot, thus endeavoring to make an already-thin story carry
the double burden of politics and a romance; and his idealistic approach which represents Barry's personal search for truth. He writes not for the public, but for the satisfaction of an artistic ideal, and this idealism is not appreciated by the average audience.

In spite of these facts, Barry has achieved a fair degree of success. The possible reasons for this will be discussed below.

The Successes

Barry's knowledge of technique, his ability to write sincere and moving dialogue, his poetic sensitivity, the acting quality of most of his work, and his varied experience all combine to make him, at his best, a truly gifted playwright. The mid-way channel he steers between wit and pathos, laughter and tears, and reason and whimsicality, is perhaps best shown by the manner in which he refuses to confine his "smart people" to their drawing rooms. His characters are invariably going back to their childhoods, the reversion perhaps being incidental as it is in Holiday, or it may be the pivot upon which the whole play turns, as in Hotel Universe, but it is pretty certain to occur, because the past is the natural ally of a writer of fantasy.

Mr. Barry lets the audience do its own thinking for
the most part, and creates a complete illusion of real human experience. Perhaps the finest touches of all are in his handling of the dialogue between the conflicting family groups in Holiday. Linda and her friends know the worth of nonsense; they never lose the spirit of the play, and in this fact lies the secret of the "moral of the play" never becoming tiresome. Barry can create delicious nonsense, and in Holiday, the reader finds the cream of those qualities which made certain parts of White Wings and In a Garden enchanting. He has avoided the fault of these earlier plays in not getting carried away entirely by nonsense and fantasy, and has introduced whimsicality only where it serves a dramatic purpose.

By far the majority of Barry's successful plays fall into the social theme grouping. The game to which the playwright sets his characters is played by well-dressed people who belong to that world of comfortable means, so often the background of high comedy. Its worries are the luxurious grievances that indolence and wealth alone can breed, but in each of the comedies Barry has managed to restate this world in his own terms and to give it a style unmistakably his own. The characters may laugh at the absurdities of and poke fun at contemporary America, but their laughing correctives are incidental, not direct. Occasionally, they may speak the language of high
comedy, but almost invariably they are swayed by the emotions of sentimental drama.

In spite of its sophistication and the paradoxical manner in which he treats it, Barry's world is a very moral one. In each of his plays, with the exception of Hotel Universe, he has approached this world with a definite thing to say, a theorem to prove, or a preaching to make. In each of his plays Barry ceases to laugh when he comes to the idea upon which the play is founded. His comedy fades from him, and his banter subsides into rather plain speaking. After considering You and I, where youthful marriage threatens to stand in the way of a son's architecture just as it has stood in the way of his father's painting, the reader realizes just how solemn the playwright can be when he is faced with his own solemnity.

Thus, from this brief consideration of Barry's plays, the reader is able to discern a few of the seemingly important facts concerning this playwright and his works. His successes have loomed large on the dramatic horizon; perhaps eventually, he will be able to eliminate those features which have caused some of his productions to be rated as failures, and will come into his own as an American dramatist of the first rank.
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