

## Myths and the Mythmaker A Literary Account of J.M. Barrie's Formative Years

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As J.M. Barrie's critical reputation is unusual and problematic, this book can best be viewed as a later act in an unfinished melodrama about Barrie. Originally viewed as a genius, fit to rank with Shaw and Wilde, Barrie soon fell victim to damaging psychological theories about his life and his patriotism, theories which encouraged biographers to focus on his supposed failings as a man at the expense of a just appreciation of his art. Literary interest in Barrie diminished and the few critics who did comment colluded with the dominant myths of the day. That Barrie soon moved from excellence and centrality in the dramatic canon to eccentricity at its edges is, therefore, hardly surprising. What serious literary student wants to waste time on a man who had an Oedipal complex and so, like his most famous creation, never grew up? Why should serious attention be paid by his own nation to a man who went to London and mocked his own people in light, fantastic works when serious social analyses of the nation's condition were called for? And why should any high seriousness be credited to a writer who scorned the opportunities of University learning when at Edinburgh?

*Myths and the Mythmaker* directly challenges these assumptions and, in doing so, attempts to reinstate Barrie as a genius on the imaginative and modernist criteria the author proposed for himself. Through closely focused textual analyses, it dispels the images of Barrie as "escapist" writer and immature, mother-fixated artist imprinted firmly on the popular imagination by media and biographers alike. It seeks to replace the narrow prose canon on which the "Oedipal" and "Kailyard" myths surrounding Barrie are based with a thorough account of his Victorian apprenticeship. New research into Barrie's early work and criticism show the enduring influence of his Edinburgh education on his creative writing, his academic articles, and his own complex views on artistic genius. From this research, there emerges the image of a self-conscious, learned artist who schools himself in all kinds of prose and drama. Barrie's later Victorian novels and dramas are also discussed with this advance in mind. In particular, *Myths and the Mythmaker* traces the gradual evolution of a consistent mythic view of the world, one which accepts Darwin's view of life as battle and uses it to re-interpret the idea of creativity, natural and artistic.

R.D.S. Jack is Emeritus Professor of Medieval and Scottish Literature at Edinburgh University. He has written widely on Scottish and Comparative literature. His earlier book on Barrie, *The Road to the Never Land*, has recently been re-printed by Zeticula.

