Mainly about the prose-poem

Willem van Doorn

To cite this article: Willem van Doorn (1921) Mainly about the prose#poem, English Studies, 3:1-6, 129-137, DOI: [10.1080/00138382108596420](https://doi.org/10.1080/00138382108596420)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00138382108596420>

Published online: 13 Aug 2008.

Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

Article views: 2

View related articles [↗](#)

Mainly About the Prose-Poem.

I.

Is it a contradiction in terms or is it not? To Molière's *Bourgeois-Gentilhomme*, duly enlightened by his *maître de philosophie*, — and as likely as not, to Molière himself! — the answer would not have seemed difficult at all. To them such a term could only have meant chaos, and the notion from which the term sprang could only have occurred to one of that mad nation whose greatest reputed genius wrote 'lamentable tragedies mixed full of pleasant mirth'. Surely, sir, one expresses oneself either in prose or in verse. It's either a walk, sir, or a dance; whoever should try to combine the two would only succeed in making himself ridiculous; he would shamle and stagger and reel like a drunkard, and if he presumed to ask a discriminating public for appreciation and applause, — why, he would be pelted with rotten eggs and orange-peel for his pains!

II.

I want this article to be, as far as possible, a man-to-man talk. I assume that all my readers are, really and truly, hearers, hearers that I expect to interrupt me on occasion. And as a matter of fact, I hear an interruption now.

"Aren't we on the wrong tack? Why this divagation about dancing and walking? If there is anything on which most literary people are agreed nowadays, it is that verse and poetry are not identical. And if they are not identical, why waste time, space and labour by opposing prose and verse? Let us go down to the roots. With 'the meaningless rituals of verse' (to use or once F. S. Flint's scathing qualification) we have nothing to do. What is poetry? What is a poem? What is a prose-poem?"

To which I might return, "And what is a poet? If no formal tests whatever are to be applied, — are you prepared to call e.g. Carlyle and Dickens poets? I know some German scholars who are quite ready to go that length. In fact the Fatherland hailed Carlyle as a poet long ago. And if Carlyle and Dickens, who were very poetical fellows and no mistake, with teeming imaginations, and with thousands of words at their disposal, gentle and forcible, beautiful and grotesque, words which they could marshal and array at will, in regiments of resounding sentences — if Carlyle and Dickens, why not Walter Scott? And if Sir Walter, why not Fielding? There are plenty of 'poetical' sentences in *Tom Jones*! Ah, but in this sublunary prison there are ever so many spirits who sometimes feel themselves confined, and who will on occasion — whether moved thereto by love, or patriotism, or wine, nay, even by beer, cider or 'square-face' — utter poetical sentences. Are they poets in those inspired moments? What, then, of the many more who, though experiencing the same emotions and perhaps far more strongly, yet remain tongue-tied? *Feeling* poetical — or romantic, or sentimental, or silly, whichever you like — and with the goddess Poesy enthroned in their hearts, surely they are poets in everything but articulateness! Moreover, they may in other fields be undoubted artists, and if formal tests are to be entirely given up, why not call any and every genuine artist a poet? After conferring the title on Fielding, Richardson, Smollett and Jane Austen, on Fenimore Cooper of the Mohicans and on Captain Marryatt, the creator of boatswain Chucks, and, quite possibly, caught in the irresistible avalanche, on Captain Mayne Reid, G. P. R. James, Hugh Conway, Fergus Hume,

Phillips Oppenheim, William le Queux, Florence Barclay, Ethel Dell, Elinor Glynn, et hoc genus omne, we cannot in reason withhold it from Purcell, Handel and Beethoven, from Van der Neer and Ruysdael, from El Greco, Claude Lorrain, Turner, Daubigny, from Sir Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, from Bouwmeester-Shylock and from James Meyer Fils, *professeur de dance* And we need not, we cannot stop even here. The famous French potter, Bernard Palissy, realizing his ideals in the teeth of a thousand adverse circumstances, crippled by the direst poverty, and never giving in, is, of course, a poet. But there are many more 'poets of action', Columbus and Joan of Arc, Alfred the Great and William the Silent, Judas Maccabæus and Piet Retief, Sir Aurel Stein, Sir Ernest Shackleton, Andrew Carnegie, Rockefeller Poets, sir, poets, every one of them!"

III.

Let there be no juggling with words. If we turn to an encyclopædia to look up *Shackleton*, *Sir Ernest*, we do not expect to see him defined as a 'poet of action'. Both the encyclopædia and the man in the street will persist in calling Sir Ernest an explorer, Rembrandt a painter, Handel a musician, Andrew Carnegie a business-man and philanthropist. And Alexander Pope, Robert Southey, Martin Tupper stand labelled as poets and will remain so as long as their names are remembered. Because they wrote poetry — bad poetry, worthless poetry, inferior poetry, if you like, but poetry — and Rembrandt and the others did not.

It is the loose and indiscriminate use of the word *poetry* that is the cause of much muddled thinking and unprofitable talk. Of course it is by no means an isolated case, but it is a particularly harmful one. Manifestly wrong as it would be to base our interpretation of the word 'captain' on Henley's boastful (and psychologically untenable) assertion that he was *the captain of his soul*, I do not think there is anybody in danger of doing so, possibly because it is a word which even a sentimentalist can pronounce without turning the whites of his moist eyes up to the skiey vault. About poetry, however, such a mass of such conflicting sayings have been uttered in the course of time, chiefly in the last two centuries, that the head of any unfortunate who, admiring the various utterers, wants to reconcile their extremely various utterances, gets converted into a steaming and boiling kettle full of the most heterogeneous soup. It is a thing made, it is a thing felt, it is a thing seen, it is a thing experienced, it is a message from Beyond, it is a luminous lamp within, it is a fascination, a spell cast upon us, it is a glamour which our own eyes throw upon what they contemplate. Byron exclaimed that the stars are the poetry of heaven, and by parity of reasoning goldfish might be termed the poetry of the pond, daisies and buttercups the poetry of meadows, thrushes the poetry of house-tops, sparrows the poetry of European streets, rats the poetry of — Enough.

IV.

I have an honest liking for our Dutch poet Peter de Genestet, two of whose utterances on poetry are rather often quoted in Holland. To attempt to reconcile them would be a tough job, and I shall not make the attempt. Number one is to the effect that 'poetry is everywhere, the question is only who can find it, and who cannot.' The other tells us, with the brevity which is the soul of wit, that 'prose and poetry are two'. It is clear that in the two verdicts the same word does service for two different notions. Are we right in assuming the first to be concerned with the 'raw material' of poetry?

Perhaps we are not, though to my opinion it is difficult to put on it an interpretation that, from a logical point of view, is more satisfactory. Its meaning would then come to this, that it is not 'aesthetic emotions' only that go to the making of poetry (and among aesthetic emotions it is quite safe to include the keen perception of the ugly which inspires *grotesque* art), but that the adequate expression, i. e. *transference* of the whole range of feelings, including 'horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation', by means of language, the language of *words*, will, if fixed in writing, be a piece of literary art. Will it therefore be a poem? Must its language to be perfectly adequate needs be metrical? Is 'recurrent rhythm', the rhythm of verse, essential? Will not 'veiled rhythm', the rhythm of literary prose, do?

I transcribe, from Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, some passages dealing with the ancient Babylonians' belief in demons. They open soberly enough:

"If we may judge from the fragments of their literature which have been deciphered, few people seem to have suffered more from the persistent assaults of demons than the ancient Babylonians and Assyrians, and the evil spirits that preyed on them were of a peculiarly cruel and malignant sort; even the gods themselves were not exempt from their attacks."

As I said before, this opening is sober; the statement is judicious; the appeal is to the intellect; the rhythm, though present, so quiet as to be almost imperceptible. This is the prose of a scientific man, whose aim is to *convince*; and who, though an eminent stylist when the spirit moves him, refrains for the moment from exerting all his literary gifts. But now Sir James warms with his subject; the bald statement having been made he enters into the feelings of the ancient Babylonians and makes us share these feelings. And the appeal being to our emotional nature, he ceases to convince, but instead *persuades*.

"These baleful beings lurked in solitary places, in graves, in the shadow of ruins and on the tops of mountains. They dwelt in the wilderness, in the holes and dens of the earth, they issued from the earth, they issued from the lower parts of the ground. Nothing could resist them in heaven above, nothing could withstand them on earth below. They roamed the streets, they leaped from house to house. The high and thick fences they penetrated like a flood, the door could not stay them, nor the bolt make them turn back. They glided through the door like a serpent, they pierced through the planks like the wind. There was no place, however small, which they could not invade, none so large that they could not fill. And their wickedness was equal to their power. "They are wicked, they are wicked," says an incantation. No prayers could move them, no supplications could make them relent; for they knew no pity, they hearkened not to reason, they knew no truth. To them all manner of evil was ascribed. Their presence was felt not only in the terrible winds that swept the land, in the fevers bred of the marshes, and in the diseases engendered by the damp heat of summer. All the petty annoyances of life — a sudden fall, an unlucky word, a headache, a paltry quarrel — were set down to the agency of fiends; and all the fierce emotions that rend the mind — love, hate, jealousy, and madness — were equally the work of these invisible tormentors. Men and women stood in constant danger of them. They tore the wife from the bosom of her husband, the son from the

knees of his father. They ate the flesh and drank the blood of men, they prevented them from sleeping or taking food, and to adopt a metaphor from one of the texts, "they ground the country like flour". Almost every part of the human frame was menaced by a special fiend. One demon assailed the head, another the neck, another the hips, and so on. They bound a man's hands, they fettered his feet, they spat poison and gall on him. Day and night must he wander without rest; sighs and lamentations were his food. They attacked even the animals. They drove doves from their dovecotes, and swallows from their nests; they smote the bull and the ass. They pursued the cattle to their stalls; they lodged with the horses in the stable; they caused the she-ass to miscarry, and the young ass at its mother's dugs to pine away. Even lifeless things could be possessed by them; for there were demons that rushed against houses and took walls by storm, that shut themselves up in doors, and hid themselves under bolts. Indeed they threatened the whole world with destruction, and there was none that could deliver from them save only the mighty god Marduk."

V.

There will be few, I presume, who will deny beauty to this piece of writing. Why is it beautiful? Is it because it treats of an abject belief in malicious demons? Of course it is not. Is it because of the 'fine words'? To give an affirmative answer would be preposterous. There is no special beauty in such words as *head*, *neck*, *hip*, *hands* and *feet*, in *bull* and *cattle* and *stable* and *she-ass*. And even they might be termed neutral words, in that they denote nothing particularly nasty; but what of the spitting, the poison and the gall?

Having said that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever, John Keats goes on to enumerate a goodly number of such joys. The sun, the moon, trees, shade, daffodils, brooklets, and stories lovely and grand. Surely, the enumeration, besides being far from complete (a thing which may be condoned) is exceedingly one-sided. But it has this advantage that few of the items given will provoke dissent. We may, however, be quite sure that many people derive genuine aesthetic pleasure from the contemplation of things that leave another, an outsider, quite cold. Not to mention extreme cases as a newborn baby — bald-headed, toothless and with a face like a ball of mincemeat — a baby all the lady-visitors pronounce adorable, there are iron-mongers who will stand, lost in honest admiration, before a well-constructed mousetrap; there is many a drawer of the longbow who, could Munchausen rise from the dead and spin a fresh yarn in his presence, would think himself unworthy to kiss the ghostly shoes of that splendidly mendacious hero; there must be broomsquires who can no more bring themselves to part with an elegantly shaped broom than Hoffmann's Parisian goldsmith could tear from his heart and deliver up to his clients the jewels which he had undertaken to make for them. And here let me state the principle that we derive aesthetic satisfaction from the contemplation of whatever presents a perfect adaptation of means to ends. Anything made by human hands that presents such a perfect adaptation — whether a tea-urn or a fishing-vessel, a barracks or a rabbit-hutch, a windmill or a railway-bridge — will be beautiful. Will it, inasmuch as it has been *made*, be a work of art? It will, on certain conditions. First of all, it must touch a string of our emotional nature, and to exemplify this, let us resort to our old friend, Wordsworth's Peter Bell. We need not now fix our attention on the yellow primrose by

the river's brim, since this lovely little masterpiece of boon nature, being of no apparent or immediate 'use', was, to Peter, practically non-existent, and moreover, we are now interested in his attitude towards things made by his fellow-men, towards his beer-mug, for instance. This exceedingly useful object must have meant a lot to him, — but only as a temporary receptacle of liquid refreshment. It may have been a beer-mug that would have gladdened the heart of any painter of *still-life*, but Peter's eyes can only have rested on it wistfully when it was empty, or feasted on its foaming contents when it was full. Stay, did the beer itself then make to Peter an appeal which we might term aesthetic? Perhaps it did, but the emotion must have been too transitory to signify. The beer was intended to slake his burning thirst, and any aesthetic emotion roused by its colour, its effervescence, its little sparks and shifting gleams, was inevitably swamped by some far lower but immeasurably stronger emotion

Secondly, this responsive chord in our being must have been singled out and aimed at beforehand by the maker of the object. Coming across a well-built barracks, a man past military age may admire its proportions, but a young conscript who hates soldiering, detests drill, and who, if he dared, would treat his sergeant with the most sovereign contempt, will hardly do so. And it was not the architect's intention that the sight of his handiwork should fill any beholder with loathing. On the contrary, he must have said to himself when setting to work, "Now I am going to build something that, in its own way, shall be as fine as the Taj-Mahal in Agra." Did he achieve his object? As regards the conscript, to whom the very idea for which the building stood was repugnant, he did not. In the case of the older man he did. And he might likewise have succeeded with a conscript of a different type, or with a professional soldier, even with the unutterable sergeant. Clearly, though primarily an object of use, the barracks may, really and truly, be an object of art. And so may anything, from a bridge to a frying-pan, from a *gobelin* down to a pair of trousers. The mischief is only that, familiarity breeding contempt, the aesthetic appeal of very useful things is exceedingly short-lived — like that of Peter Bell's beer.

VI.

In proportion as the 'usefulness' of a thing is less obvious, its aesthetic appeal will be more insistent and more lasting, and necessarily so, because otherwise it will soon find its way to the rubbish-heap. Peter Bell's son inherited his father's beer-mug. Being a total abstainer he had no use for it, but — was it the artist in him, was it lack of energy, was it filial reverence? — he neither destroyed the accursed drinking-vessel nor parted with it to a dealer in *bric-à-brac*. No, he placed it — loving, not loathing — on his old-fashioned sideboard, for ornament, and in course of time the inebriating purpose it had served became completely forgotten. The thing, in fact, was no longer a mug, but a vase, a thing of beauty; was admired by visitors for its colour, shape, workmanship, and sometimes, by the gracious permission of Mrs. Bell the Younger, reverently handled by Dorothy Wordsworth or Mrs. De Quincey . . .

It is, of course, deplorable that many people should buy ugly tea-cups, coffee-pots, clocks and pianos, but it is unreasonable to expect them to get rid of these abominations as soon as their eyes are opened and they know them for the ungainly contraptions they are. For one thing, they cost money. And many a man will rather drink his tea out of an ugly cup than spend his last shilling on a finer one, going without his tea. The tawdry clock may be punctual, the sound of the ill-shaped and overdecorated piano may

be all right etc. We cannot but admit this, while insisting that a blank wall is better than one boasting a bad picture. Surely, such pictures ought to be destroyed, the walls they defile cleaned and cleansed. And bad musical compositions should not be hummed, sung, whistled or played, on penalty of life-long banishment. And bad, i. e. ugly, insincere and ill-written books, should go to feed a bonfire, not even a single copy for the British Museum being retained

After a long, but necessary digression, we have returned to books and to literature.

VII.

All that is written or printed is not literature, but all that is not literature is not on that account worthless. Not to mention price-lists, advertisements, regulations and byelaws, there are scientific books; and purely scientific books, although their keen reasoning, combined with clearness and economy of words, may produce the intensest aesthetic satisfaction, — are not literature, since their appeal is to the intellect and the beauty which a scientific man discerns in them, is a by-product. But purely scientific books there are comparatively few. In the majority of cases there will be, on the part of their authors, attempts to persuade as well as attempts to convince. Any scientific book that is intended for a wider circle of readers than that of specialists and experts, will serve to illustrate this fact, Sir James Frazer's 'Golden Bough', from which I have already quoted, being a brilliant example. So are Hudson's famous books on natural history, Macaulay's, Prescott's, Parkman's historical works, several books on economics, ethnology, psychology, art, many books of travel. They are literature because, in addition to their intellectual interest, they present a conscious endeavour to stir our emotions, which they do by quickening our imaginations, substituting, wherever they can, images for abstract symbols, and by the use of language which, though not metrical, is unmistakably rhythmical, rhythm being indispensable to draw our attention away from our immediate surroundings and everyday concerns, so that our imaginations are free to follow the author's. And what holds good for such 'scientific' books, applies with even greater force to works of fiction.

Poetry as a literary form is older than prose. Homer precedes Plato. The cause, I think, is not so very far to seek. Poems were sacred things, letters were sacred things, divine inventions. Poems having been handed down from generation to generation, the language in which they were couched — the metrical and often artificial language in which laws and customs, myths and legends, agricultural and other precepts, in short in which all tribal lore was transmitted and memorized, and again transmitted — differed in countless respects from actual speech

For a long time after being committed to writing they must have continued to set the fashion for other literary compositions. Think of love-letters. It is only educated people who can, i. e. who *dare*, let themselves go, in writing, in a way that is at once natural and passionately persuasive, whereas the cook in her epistolary confidences to her hussar will use the stilted forms and worn-out tags crowding the pages of the ill-written, quasi-romantic shockers that form her literary pabulum. The poor creature thinks it is "the thing" to do so, and imitates the jargon in which, as she fondly believes, *Mijnheer de Graaf* is accustomed to unbosom himself to the fair and refined Amelia. Being simple and colloquial (on paper) is, to her, *bad form*. And those ancient Greeks — Plato and the rest — must have been bold men, and must to many an old-fashioned compatriot have appeared bad men as

well, who first based their prose-style upon the language which they heard spoken about them and which they spoke themselves. But in trusting to the living language and to their own observant ears they were right, and speech being of necessity rhythmical they wrote rhythmical sentences, as everybody will who hears in his imagination whatever his pen is scribbling upon his paper.

VIII.

A modern English novelist whose writings illustrate this truth page after page, is W. E. Norris. He is not to be confounded with his American colleagues and namesakes Frank Norris and Charles Norris; neither is he in the front rank of authors. But our students, who would be ill-advised in modelling their sentences on those of Macaulay, Dickens or Meredith, might do worse than assimilate the pages of 'My Friend Jim', the opening sentences of which follow here.

"I remember it all as clearly as if it had happened yesterday afternoon. It is one of those little scenes which, without being specially significant or suggestive, manage somehow or other to imprint themselves upon the memory, and which remain there while so many hundreds of others fade away and vanish, as the years go on. When I closed my eyes for a moment just now the whole thing came back to me — the dark, musty - smelling study, with one broad sunbeam stretching right across it from the window; Bracknell, Jim, and I standing close together beside the high, empty fire place; old Lord Staines, looking uncommonly smart and spruce (as he always did in those days), a flower in his buttonhole, and a smile of serene beatitude on his handsome face; and my tutor blinking through his spectacles and addressing himself, after his customary fashion, to no one in particular."

This is the sort of prose for which one looks in vain in 'anthologies' like that of Mr. Pearsall Smith*), which I am bound to confess I dislike for more than one reason, chiefly for its vandalism in asking us to admire enamelled bricks instead of walls, fragments and ruins instead of buildings, but hardly less for setting up utterly false standards of what prose should be. To hold that, like every work of art, a literary product should, as far as possible, be judged as a whole, for that is what the literary artist set out to give. A novelist ought not to be admired merely for the sake of some descriptive pages or passages, but because the novel as such is well-written and well-constructed. A historian, a naturalist, an archæologist, should first of all be applauded for their judicious marshalling of unshakable facts, and only then for their 'purple patches', or rather for the golden buttercups that spring up, unsought, in the green and fresh grass of the meadows of their learning. A mediocre poem ought not to be gushed over merely because of some felicitous lines or epithets. And similarly, unimportant blemishes should be readily forgiven where the complete structure satisfies heart, soul and senses.

As regards prose, as it is nearest to every-day speech we shall always expect it to deal, first of all, in a homely, unobtrusive way with prosaic things, or with matters that concern the mind rather than the heart. If *The Golden Bough* consisted of nothing but lyrically descriptive passages such as those I have quoted, its fourteen volumes would be unreadable. They would impose too exhaustive a strain on our emotions for our minds to be able to take in, with befitting soberness of judgment, the far-reaching hypo-

*) 'A Treasury of English Prose', (Constable).

theses submitted for our consideration. And, as in a well-written prose-work poetic passages come unsought and unexpected, and do not crowd one another, we go, when we are in a lyrical mood and crave for lyrical outbursts, to an address where we know there is a supply for our demand. We go to the lyrical poet, who even when he has little to say, is enabled by the art of verse to turn this little into exquisite melody. He is the boy to sing us a song. Granted that verse is a more artificial form than prose, this matters not a whit, if we are constitutionally able to take a pleasure in artistry resulting from self-imposed restraints, restraints which — so long as they are in the tradition and not a manifestation of eccentricity — prove to be a help instead of a hindrance. The parallelism of a ballad, if well-managed, will satisfy and please; the like parallelism in a prose story will be intolerable, or, at best, please only once. Little prose-poetry is really exquisite; if the attempt is made at all, the result, as soon as it covers more than, say, four of five pages of print, is cloying. I am thinking here of the aphoristic prose-poems, written in Dutch by the Javanese prince Noto Soeroto. They are enervating, they produce mental lassitude. And the prose-poetry that we find, at intervals, in novels, in historical works, in 'persuasive' scientific books is, as a rule, rather noisy, and naturally so. When a man is talking to us and grows eloquent, he does not begin to sing, but he raises his voice. This is what most writers of prose-poetry do. They give the blare of brass instruments, which may be very inspiring, and the booming of the big drum, which I do not despise, which is often welcome, and more often necessary. At their best their music may be compared to the sound of that admirable instrument, the violoncello, but these moments of excellence are very few and very far between. And the violin, most exquisite and beautiful instrument of all — do I err when I say that as a rule its music is beyond the skill of even the most gifted prose-poet? Who among prose-writers can give us the *valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige* that we find in Baudelaire's *Harmonie du Soir*? In theory I cannot deny the possibility, but — where is the instance?

Well, I do remember some instances of exquisite prose-poems, by Dunsany. And there is one in Dutch which I rate highest of all; it is Lodewijk van Deyssel's prose-lyric 'on prose', and here follows part of an excellent English translation, by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, and occurring in the *London Mercury* for April, 1920.

"I love the sentences that march like troops of broad-backed men, walking abreast, shoulder to shoulder, following one on the other in ever-widening ranks, up hill, down dale, with the tramp of their footsteps and heavy movement of their strides. I love sentences that sound like voices underground, but come rising, rising, louder and in greater numbers, and pass and rise and ring and echo in the heavens.

I love words that arrive suddenly, as though from very far, shooting forth in golden brilliancy from a rift in the blue sky, or toppling high in the air, like dark rocks discharged from a straining volcano.

I love words that bang down upon me like falling rafters, or words that hiss past me like bullets.

I love words which I see standing there unexpectedly, like poppies or blue cornflowers in a field.

I love words that suddenly waft a perfume to me from the course of the style, like incense from a church-door or scent from a woman's handkerchief in the street.

I love words that in a moment rise softly, like a child's murmuring voice, from under the droning style.

I love words that just gurgle, like little stifled sobs.

I love the prose that blazes its joy and its rapture like stars above me, that lights glowing suns of love, that carries me over the thin ice of its disdain, through the rough black nights of its hatred, that clangs down upon me the green, copper voice of its irony and its laughter.

If you would please me, then stretch over my head a rainbow of language in which I shall see red anger raging, blue gladness rejoicing and yellow mockery laughing.

Take me up and carry me where you will: I crave for nothing more than to be powerless against the power of your Word.

Strike me with your Word, torture me with your Word and then let your Word fall down upon me like a rain of kisses....."

IX.

Here I wish to make an end for the present. I am fully conscious that the subject is by no means exhausted, and I intend to return to it afterwards. Meanwhile I shall be glad to hear both from those who assent to my main propositions and from 'dissenters'.

WILLEM VAN DOORN.

Some Plays by Barrie.

The Barrie-ettes.

In contradiction to Shakespeare's much-quoted "What's in a name", I think there often is very much in a name indeed. *Barrie-ettes* with its French ending conveys to the mind something elegant, something of airy gracefulness, something that cannot possibly be clumsy, heavy and ponderous. And if there is one thing to be said of Barrie's plays in the very first instance, it is that by their airy grace and sweet fancy, they are something absolutely apart and unique in Modern English stage-literature. Maybe some one will come and say, "but surely you cannot call the Modern Irish play a clumsy and awkward thing. Are not the plays by Synge fanciful and airy?" That is quite true, but then they base so much of their charm on old Irish Mythology and superstitions and fancies that have existed for centuries and centuries among the Irish peasantry, and they bristle with the names of the Old Gods and mythical persons, which if we do not know them tell us nothing at all. Whereas with Barrie it is all his own and springs from his own mind clear and bright and fresh as a mountain-stream and as new and bewitching as a plant that has just budded forth. And what is so curious with Barrie: all he writes seems quite natural and the most ordinary things of life are pervaded with an air of sweetness through his treatment of them.

With Barrie nothing is impossible, but Barrie's impossibility does not irritate us, does not make us cry out: "Oh, but that is absolute nonsense." We feel, as if somehow we have never looked at life in the right way, have only considered things in our matter-of-fact and practical dryness. It is as if Barrie was the first to detect all the glory there is in this life and in this world, in spite of its many horrors and sufferings. It is not as if