

Notes from the Dramaturg

“If only we could do it over again...” Few of us have lived without expressing such a wish. In *Dear Brutus*, Sir James Matthew Barrie asks: what if we could do more than simply *wish*? What if we – as individuals and as societies – could live an alternate life? Barrie poses this question to 11 people in his own 1917 Scottish society.

J.M. Barrie earned his fame with the spectacular popularity of *Peter Pan* following its premiere in 1904, but *Dear Brutus* later brought Barrie great success during World War I. *Dear Brutus* opened in 1917 and initially ran for 363 performances at Wyndham’s Theatre in London, and garnered more attention than any other new play during the 1914-1918 period. Rare among the more frivolous plays of Britain’s war years, *Dear Brutus* addressed the secret thoughts of the Allied populations – avoiding outright mention of politics while giving voice to widespread wartime pain. World War I brought the grim agony of trench warfare, as well as over 700,000 casualties from Great Britain amidst a total of 9 million war deaths. The technological developments of the 19th century had promised prosperity, yet delivered destruction. The Allied world no longer had “perfect faith” that technology would bring only progress and happiness, and all laughter in the theatre was now haunted by this loss of confidence.

Barrie wrote *Dear Brutus* during the despair of what was then called “The Great War,” when disillusionment borne of technology’s destructive power resurrected nostalgic dreams of that once-certain world in which machinery would be used to build rather than decimate. In today’s world, where it is not uncommon to hear regrets voiced about past political and personal choices, Barrie’s play helps us ask whether we have the strength to pursue the possibilities about which we dream – or the ability to appreciate the gifts that enhance our lives. Thank you for joining us for this exploration of self-knowledge and second chances in *Dear Brutus*.