

MAUDE ADAMS: HER LIFE AND CAREER

by

SARA ELLEN WHEATLEY RODERER

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Harold J. Nichols  
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## PREFACE

Maude Adams was an American actress who reached the pinnacle of her stage career in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She was a child actress whose youthful experiences helped her mold a unique talent. Because she was a very private person as an adult, the public clamored for news about her personal life. Maude Adams had warmth, sincerity, an elfin magic, and a winning personality. Theater-goers loved the predominantly wholesome characters she personified. Her charisma was contagious, creating a star when the star-making system was at its height.

I have provided the basic information for what I feel was the developmental process of her successful career. Included are reviews from various publications and personal glimpses provided by Miss Adams herself, and those who knew her well. I feel that I have shown a cohesive line of development from her birth in 1872 to her retirement in 1920. To my knowledge, there exists no other compact appraisal of her theatrical success.

Unlike many theatrical personages of the past and present who dreamed of or fell into a stage career by accident, Maude Adams seemed almost trapped into such a career by her environment; not that she came from a great theatrical family like the Barrymores or the Drews, where the individual family members were almost destined for a theatrical career. But often it takes only one spark to light a lifetime fire, and for Maude the igniting factor was her mother, an actress from Salt Lake City named Annie Adams who began her career in the Mormon Theater. Annie had a will, strength, and discipline that she later instilled in her daughter and that easily could have come from her forefathers who stepped off the Mayflower in 1620. This fortitude might also have come from Annie's mother who had trekked across the country with Brigham Young's pioneers and helped found the Mormon community.

Annie, as a child, was chosen by one of Brigham Young's wives to begin her acting career. It was no surprise that Maude, who was born November 11, 1872, made her stage debut only nine months later in a play called The Lost Child at the Salt Lake City Theatre. Maude was a last minute replacement for a baby who had appeared in the first act and who became hysterical for the last act when a baby was essential to the story line. The ludicrousness of the situation was that the first act baby was six weeks old and Maude was nine months (and twice as big). Her debut lasted the run of the play, but her father, James Kiskadden, who married Annie in 1869, had a strong Scotch-Irish will and felt his daughter did not belong on the stage. James and Annie had lost twin sons before Maude was

born, and she was highly valued by her parents.

Since they had no more children, Maude was loved, coddled and protected like a cherished possession. When Maude was five, Annie was cast in a play that needed a child actor and she suggested her daughter. Maude's father relented only because Maude begged him to let her do it. She was cast as Little Schneider with one hundred lines to learn in J. K. Emmet's play Our Fritz in 1877.

She was a quick study and with her mother's constant drill for precision, learned her lines parrot-perfect. She was such a success that her name was placed on the bill as "Little Maudie Adams," using her mother's maiden name at the request of her father. It was not an easy part for she had to be tied to a mill wheel and had to scream on cue. For a less eager pupil the stage career might have ended sooner. But Little Maudie seemed to love every moment of it. Maude was somewhat precocious, but seemed to have a winning charm which prevented her from being obnoxious. During this young period she was cast in a play with an actress named Bell Douglass who feared for Maude's memory, so she learned Maude's lines. Maude meanwhile learned Bell's lines letter perfect and would prompt Bell on stage. She appeared in approximately thirty plays playing male and female roles. At the age of seven she and her mother were under the managership of David Belasco in San Francisco who said that even at this early age, Maude had a "quaint face, a sweeping magnetism that was hard to define and a charming personality."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Acton Davies, Maude Adams (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1901), p. 19.



Maude's mother worked with her on each new part, going over the part line by line, since Maude had not yet learned to read. Her mother was strict but very loving. Maude was always very serious and listened intently to all directorial notes. She became a real heroine in a play called Chums when she portrayed a character named Crystal. If there was no part for her, she sang popular songs between acts. Maude herself said "children take to the stage as ducks to water, and surely there can be no kinder life than that which hedges in a child of the theatre, and never in all her life will she meet more gentle people."<sup>2</sup> As early as age six she was consulted about all aspects of her young career, including billing and salary. She was not shy about speaking for herself. At age nine she was packed off to school, the Salt Lake City Presbyterian Collegiate Institute, where she stayed for several years.

When Maude was ten years old, her father died. Soon the loneliness and structured life style of the Presbyterian school became unappealing to her, and around her fourteenth birthday she wrote her mother saying "it is no use my studying any more. In fact, it's all nonsense unless I'm to go into literature or am to be a teacher. But I want to go on the stage again so I can be with you."<sup>3</sup> So Maude joined her mother and traveled the small towns of California as an extra. She was no longer the darling "Little Maudie," but simply Annie Adam's daughter. She said of herself during this period: "'Playing' began in earnest, and the delightful sense of importance that had

<sup>2</sup>Phyllis Robbins, Maude Adams: An Intimate Portrait (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>Acton Davies, p. 32.

been mine as a child-actress was taken out of me. It seemed as if anyone could do better than I did. In every part I was worse than in the one before, and even my mother admitted that it would be a mercy if gestures could be dispensed with entirely."<sup>4</sup>

Maude often forgot her lines and could not make the necessary points. Annie did not give up on Maude and worked with her constantly. Meanwhile, Maude worried that she could not overcome all the obstacles and became a very shy, private and self-conscious person; traits she could never lose during her lifetime. She camouflaged and overcame them when appearing on the stage but could not even feel comfortable enough to give a speech or play games at her most intimate friends' homes. In fact, she was usually aghast when asked to join into the festivities, saying that pretending to be someone else was easy compared to being oneself. The irony of these situations was that according to the critics, she played herself usually, using her own shy, quaint, sweet and wholesome personality.

About this early period in her life, Maude said: "They put me in a Presbyterian college. I stayed until I was fourteen; then I came back to the stage again, to have my dreams cruelly disturbed, my hopes dashed. The stage I loved would have nothing to do with me. I was too old for child parts, too young for mature parts. I was tall and small and thin,-- and I was hopelessly bashful."<sup>5</sup> The outgoing and somewhat brash child of the pre-teen years crashed headlong into the gangliness and uncertainty of puberty, producing a very strange future product; an actress, a star, a

<sup>4</sup>Phyllis Robbins, pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup>Acton Davies, p. 58.

personality so popular that the audience didn't even need to know the name of the play when entering the theater--all they needed was the name Maude Adams on the sign out front.

When Maude was fifteen, Charles Frohman came to San Francisco and Annie arranged an interview. Annie did the talking and Maude hid behind a chair. Frohman said to look him up when they got to New York, but with an admonition to have Maude drop the western "R." She did just as he had suggested so thoroughly that she seldom finished words ending in "R" and she ignored the R in words like mother or westerly.

Annie hesitated going east until by some good fortune a company came west doing a play called The Paymaster, and with much trepidation Maude signed on for the trek eastward to New York. The heroine was to be thrown into a river by the villain, so a large tank of water was used for realism. The leading lady deigned not to dive so Maude was chosen to her delight to take the plunge and the part. Maude soon caught a cold and Annie, fearing for Maude's health and safety, took the plunge for Maude every night going east across the country. The manager, a Mr. Harrison, had not been too receptive to the idea, but Annie wasn't recognized by the audience as not being the heroine so all continued swimmingly. The whole idea upset Maude who thought she should do it herself, until one night when the hero jumped from the rock to save the struggling heroine (her mother) and hit the edge of the tank, injuring himself seriously.

When the company reached New York, the play was recast to strengthen it, and Maude was demoted to the role of a servant girl, Moyna Sullivan.

She made her New York debut August 10, 1888, in The Paymaster, but there were no press notices and no splash over her appearance. The play closed, and after several weeks of discouragement and hunger, Annie decided to return to San Francisco. Then word arrived that Mr. E. H. Sothern's company in Boston had a part for a young girl. The play was Lord Chumley, and Maude was to play Jessie Deene, replacing another actress. Her first performance was November 19, 1888 at the age of 16. The press took no notice of her that night at the Hollis Street Theatre. Exactly ten years later in the same theater on November 19, 1898, Maude closed in The Little Minister which she had played for 65 performances to packed houses.

One of her first important press notices came several weeks later for her role in Lord Chumley, when the Peoria Journal said "Maude Adams is as pretty a soubrette as one can see in an afternoon promenade--a sweet and tender blossom on the dramatic tree."<sup>6</sup> The critic must certainly have had a backrow seat, for Maude was still very much a gawky and not very confident teenager from reports of those who knew her at that time.

In March of 1889 Charles Hoyt engaged her to play Dot Bradbury, the old maid schoolmistress in a comedy called A Midnight Bell. The play had a substantial run and garnered a following for Maude with the public, but none with the press; they simply passed over her. In the fall Mr. Hoyt offered Maude a five year contract and financial security to play farce. At the same time an offer came from Charles Frohman's newly formed stock company, but for only half the salary that Hoyt was offering. Because she

<sup>6</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 26.

felt that Frohman's offer would lead to a fuller dramatic career, she accepted a very small part with his company. Thus began an association that was to last twenty years under the tutelage and guidance of her manager, Charles Frohman. Acton Davies commented on this alliance in his book Maude Adams in 1901:

it is safe to say that neither Mr. Frohman nor Miss Adams, in their wildest and most ambitious dreams realized what a huge amount of fame and fortune the signing of that piece of paper meant to both of them; for waiving Miss Adam's claims as an artist aside, it is an accepted fact today that, regarded merely as a business proposition, a drawing card, no American star, however much greater her histrionic powers might be, has ever had so tremendous and widespread a popularity as Maude Adams enjoys in the United States today. In many communities this popularity has amounted almost to a mania which blinds her audiences absolutely to her faults and grossly exaggerates even her greatest charms. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that there are hundreds of playgoers in New York and other American cities who would accept Miss Adams seriously and enthusiastically if she attempted to play Lady Macbeth.<sup>7</sup>

For two seasons, 1890 and 1891, Maude appeared in various small roles. On September 8th she portrayed Evangeline Bender in All the Comforts of Home, a play arranged by William Gillette. On October 21, 1890, she played Dora Prescott in Men and Women, to open the Twenty-Third Street Theatre. Maude also appeared in small parts in My Geraldine and Diplomacy. On November 16, 1891, she made her debut in a major role as Nell, a crippled working girl, in The Lost Paradise, a play co-authored by David Belasco and Henry De Mille. It was a role of pathos, a tear-jerker to be sure.

Amy Leslie described her at this time in her career:

<sup>7</sup>Acton Davies, p. 40.

Maude was pale and an emotional creature without even a complexion in excuse for total absence of physical attraction. Her neck was scrawny and her arms were too long, but her fierce little bit of melodrama in The Lost Paradise roused people on watch to peer into the dawn of a specially equipped personality. Then did Miss Adams begin to grow. Physically she unfolded into a flower of distinction and attractiveness . . . Her figure developed, her face took upon its unhealthy thinness . . . a delicacy of bloom and intellectuality . . . She is original and intelligent; her talent is one of mind and manner rather than fire and spirituality . . . She is one of the loveliest characters among women of the stage; she is quite the best dressed actress in the world . . . She has courageously arrayed careful study of her chosen art against featherweight talent for the stage . . . She veils the lack of lofty gifts with the sweet truth of womanliness, and blows upon the embers of faint talent the breath of fine impulse and spirited imagination.<sup>8</sup>

After two seasons with the stock company playing tearful parts, Maude decided she wanted to play comedy roles, so she set off for Frohman's office. He understood her ambition and could see she wanted to play more important parts. Mr. Frohman told her that if she was dissatisfied he would accept her resignation. She started for the door when he stopped her and said he would put her in Mr. Drew's company as his leading lady. John Drew was terminating a relationship with Augustin Daly that had lasted 15 years, 12 of which Drew had spent playing opposite lovely Ada Rehan. Frohman's colleagues, Drew's fans, and the critics were dismayed when Frohman chose Maude as Rehan's replacement. Maude herself was quite shocked by the news; she had asked for a broader base from which to play, but this chance seemed overwhelming. All of her roles had been tearful and pathetic, and now she had a chance to try comic characters. She said of her leading man: "Mr. Drew's method was entirely

<sup>8</sup>Amy Leslie, *Some Players* (Chicago: Herbert S. Stone and Company, 1899), pp. 367-368.

different from Mr. Sothern's. Mr. Sothern's seemingly unconscious comedy had everything in train, the pauses calculated to a second . . . The actors knew their scenes as a musician knows a page of music. Mr. Drew, delighted in the conscious, sophisticated comedy. He seemed to court accidents for the pleasure of conquering them . . . He taught one readiness to take advantage of an accident or happenchance, so that every wind that blew brought something to the good."<sup>9</sup>

On October 3, 1892, at Palmer's Theater The Masked Ball, an adaptation from the French by Clyde Fitch, was presented. It ran for 18 months. In 1894 the play was taken to San Francisco, a circumstance which offered Maude a chance to return to a city where she and her mother had spent an important portion of their lives, a triumphal return to the spawning grounds.<sup>10</sup>

In The Masked Ball Maude played a young wife, Suzanne Blondet. Maude collected 12 curtain calls at the play's end for her opening night in a major role. One New York critic said "But the great situation of the play does not fall to Mr. Drew's share. Miss Maude Adams, a young actress who until this evening had only been seen in minor roles, fairly shared the honours with Mr. Drew. Her performance was a revelation, exceedingly delicate, delightfully humorous. In the second act she had to appear drunk but still a gentlewoman. When she made her exit, the applause lasted a full two minutes. Her scenes of tenderness were

<sup>9</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup>Edmond M. Gagey, The San Francisco Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. 188.

equally good and her alternate raillery and contrition were rendered with a delightfully delicate touch.<sup>11</sup>

The critics were amazed at the gracious and ladylike portrayal of the young wife, pretending to be drunk. One said "The spectacle of a drunken woman on the stage is revolting, coarse, and offensive to a cultured audience. But this young woman is a lady of grace and refinement, beautiful and delicate with a slight physique for an actress. Her face is small and spirituelle [sic] framed in fair hair and she has a low, sweet voice with a pretty English accent."<sup>12</sup>

Amy Leslie commented, "The part of Madame Blondet is a rare, brilliant, high comedy role and Miss Adams touched the subtle character with a deliciously original color, beautifully complimentary to Drew's satirical elegance. She did not look the part . . . She had an awkward, boyish manner and a mild delicate face . . . But she impressed thoughtful people as being one of those lasting artists who grow upon the public and achieve immense popularity; she was so sincere, clear, and simple in her methods, and plainly intellectual."<sup>13</sup> Harper's Weekly January 31, 1893, contained this prophesy, "It is difficult to see just who is going to prevent Miss Adams from becoming the leading exponent of light comedy in America."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Acton Davies, p. 48. Maude Adams' biographers often quoted critics without identifying them by name or publication. When the reviewer's name was available, I have used it. Different sources frequently offer different versions of the same quotations, therefore some quoted material undoubtedly does not appear here in precisely the same form as it appeared in the original version.

<sup>12</sup>Acton Davies, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup>Amy Leslie, p. 369.

<sup>14</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 33.



Soon after Maude's performance as Suzanne in The Masked Ball, Mr. Drew's niece joined the company in a series of small parts, and she and Maude became friends. Maude describes Ethel Barrymore as "the most interesting member of Mr. Drew's company . . . A lovely girl . . . she had the most charming ways, and a delightful young seriousness about her work."<sup>15</sup> Maude's mother was also a member of the company and acted in all the plays during the Drew period, but apparently she never performed with Maude again after 1897.

For five years Maude appeared with John Drew in a series of successes. In February of 1894 she played Miriam at Palmer's Theatre in The Butterflies by Henry Guy Carleton. One critic said "Miss Adams, an actress of exceptional talent, plays with charming intelligence and restraint."<sup>16</sup> Another said, "Her laughter was delicious. It was different from an ordinary laugh. It welled up musically from a light, girlish heart. It trilled as a bird trills. It was the laugh of a gentlewoman of refined merriment."<sup>17</sup>

The Bauble Shop opened for 95 performances September 11, 1894. Maude portrayed Jessie Keber, a toymaker's daughter, who meets Lord Clivebrooke, a young leader of the House of Commons. He is not an honorable man, but Jessie's sweetness and purity shame him. He swears to leave her alone, but they are caught together by a member of the opposition party. Since Clivebrooke is about to introduce a bill concerning public

<sup>15</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 34.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup>Ada Patterson, Maude Adams: A Biography (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1907; rpt. 1971), p. 47.

morality, his adversary in politics brands him as a libertine unless he promises to abandon the bill; Clivebrook refuses and says he'll marry Jessie. The play continues with much pathos, simplicity, and contrivance.

Miss Leslie said that Maude was "impressive in The Bauble Shop. She is so natural and womanly and has so much fine emotional talent whatever part is given her to play, there is found a sympathetic chord in tune with her own lovely temperament. She is direct and graceful and is alive with the finer, more soulful emotions, so that she sighs and melts and droops with a simple pleasantness."<sup>18</sup> One critic said "She was charming in her simple sincerity. Her methods are delicate, her temperament sensitive and sympathetic, and her personality gracious and modest."<sup>19</sup>

That Imprudent Young Couple, another play by Carleton, opened September 23, 1895, for only 16 performances at the Empire Theatre. The critics did not care for the play. "The story is old, the plot uninteresting, and the part of the hero is an exceptionally fine specimen of the genus cad. The character of the young wife is scarcely better than that of the husband, and that Miss Adams was able to interest her audience at all last night was due entirely to the charm of her own personality . . . Her work is still exceptional in its daintiness and simplicity . . . At present Miss Adams is easily the most accomplished and womanly artist of all the young actresses . . . All the honors of last night's performance belonged to Miss Adams."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Amy Leslie, p. 369.

<sup>19</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup>Acton Davies, p. 66.

That Imprudent Young Couple closed quickly and was replaced with a play by Madelaine Lucette Ryley, Christopher, Jr.

October 7, 1895 saw the opening of this play, with Maude as Dora, for 64 performances. A reviewer commented, "Miss Adams has a good part, the best--in the technical sense--yet allotted to her. She is called upon to denote sudden changes of mood, from anger, contempt and amazement, to extravagant joy. Her acting fairly justifies the enthusiastic admiration of her friends."<sup>21</sup>

"In one scene Miss Adams broken hearted at the prospect of a long parting from her lover, sits down at the piano and sings for him . . . She struggled through the first lines and gradually note by note her voice began to fail; a lump crept into one's throat from sheer sympathy and then with a sudden crash and a sob down went her head upon the music rack, and actress and audience wept metaphorically on each other's shoulders."<sup>22</sup> For this performance, Maude received a standing ovation.

Of her next role, The Squire of Dames, produced January 21, 1896, one reporter said, "Miss Adam's quiet words came with force, her fears and grief and quick, amazed recovery of hope were triumphs of emotional expression."<sup>23</sup> Ada Patterson felt Maude was miscast as a flippant, totally heartless young society matron named Adele, a truly disappointing character for so sweet an actress.

August 31, 1896, brought Rosemary to the Empire Theatre. It was popular enough to sustain itself for 136 performances. Maude played

<sup>21</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup>Acton Davies, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 34.

Dorothy Cruickshank, a young girl in a quaint bonnet and shawl, who tries to elope with her lover in a broken carriage in the rain. They are helped by Sir Jasper Thorndyke, played by John Drew. Annie Adams played Mrs. Cruickshank, Dorothy's mother. The contrived and complicated plot occurred over a period of fifty years. Dorothy falls in love with Sir Jasper and gives him a sprig of Rosemary. Fifty years later, he finds the Rosemary, but has forgotten the lovely young girl who loved him so dearly so many years before, and never revealed her love. It was a real tear-jerker for all ardent Adams fans.

Acton Davies felt, "It was charming. As sweet and wholesome as the little plant whose name it bears, Rosemary triumphed."<sup>24</sup> Maude was described by a reviewer, "The heroine was made incarnate simplicity by Miss Maude Adams, more clever, and charming than ever. It is the great merit of Miss Adam's performance that she keeps ever in view the simple ingenuousness of Dorothy's nature."<sup>25</sup>

While Rosemary was still running, in October of 1896, an event occurred that changed Maude's life. James M. Barrie arrived in America for a first visit. He brought with him the yet unfinished dramatization of his popular novel, The Little Minister. Mr. Barrie had hopes of finding a strong actor for the title role of Babbie. It was Charles Frohman who had encouraged him to adapt his novel to a play. While Barrie was in New York, Frohman arranged a box for him at the Empire Theatre where he saw Maude

<sup>24</sup>Acton Davies, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 34.

in Rosemary. Although stories differ, he apparently was so taken with her performance that he abandoned his search for a strong male actor and instead altered, added to, padded, and in actuality centered the play around the character of Lady Babbie for Maude.<sup>26</sup>

The relationship between Barrie and Maude was a long lasting one. One of Barrie's biographers, Denis Mackail, said of the alliance, "which if either of them really felt indebted to the other will probably never be known; for both had temperaments, and both had good grounds for taking more credit than they might openly admit . . . It was eighteen years after that performance of Rosemary before Barrie next saw her on the stage, though in the interval she had starred for him in America over and over again."<sup>27</sup>

It was now time for Maude to leave her many successes with John Drew and become a star in her own right. Frohman was giving her star billing and her own company, and she had not yet turned twenty-five. Frohman handled everything and as Maude had always depended heavily on her mother in the past, she now depended on Frohman to lead and guide her. Maude needed and enjoyed being protected and, as she said, "a star had very little authority, the manager was the head of the company."<sup>28</sup> Maude was not completely defenseless though, for she had her own philosophy, which apparently worked well for her. "I think the men have taken pretty good

<sup>26</sup>Janet Dunbar, J. M. Barrie: The Man Behind the Image (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), p. 126.

<sup>27</sup>Denis Mackail, Barrie: The Story of J. M. B. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), p. 264.

<sup>28</sup>Phillis Robbins, p. 49.

care of us all these years and I don't see what is the matter with letting them keep it up. Any woman half-way clever can make the man do just as she wants to have them, and at the same time keep them thinking they are having their own way,--and what more would she have?"<sup>29</sup> Her gentle charms and quiet sincerity apparently worked; for although she was a diligent and tireless worker, her womanliness won Frohman's devotion, which was apparently quite a feat for the man who ruled with an iron hand.

She opened in The Little Minister at the Empire Theatre on September 27, 1897. The critics were hesitant about this new star; the New York Times conceded that her "personal charm was never more potent and she was satisfying to the most exact taste."<sup>30</sup> The play ran for 300 performances in New York, 65 in Boston; and the winter of 1898-1899 was spent on tour. Her popularity grew dramatically with this play, establishing her as a star of the top rank. Maude returned to New York in 1900 for more performances of The Little Minister. William Winter said in the New York Daily Tribune of January 10,

Miss Maude Adams who appeared last night at the Criterion Theatre, as [Lady] Babbie in The Little Minister was cheerily greeted by a throng of admirers, and her vivacious impersonation of Mr. Barrie's fantastic, gypsy-like half elfish heroine was again observed with sympathy and pleasure . . . Miss Adams's innocent, artless, girl-like personality is attractive, despite a nasal vocalism and a 'down east' manner, and she diffuses a charm of ingenuous temperament. Imagination, passion, distinction, intellectual character, brilliancy and force are not attributes of her individuality and are consequently not shown in her acting, but her half rueful aspect and her

<sup>29</sup>Acton Davies, p. 110.

<sup>30</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 42.

gentle ways, now demurely serious and now gleefully bouyant, invest her theatrical proceedings with an alluring grace, so that to remember one of her performances is to think of an odd, quaint, brisk little creature, unique in her way, essentially feminine, prone to quickly variable moods, and spontaneously apt in the expression of them. This story in many respects is comfortable to her temperament and her powers, and it enables her to express, with more or less engaging effect, impulse, pertness, perversity, caprice, discontent, mischief, longing, self-will, arch and tantalizing recklessness. . . .<sup>31</sup>

Mr. Winter continued that the play was all pure and sweet but for a real literary experience one should read the book, the play having altered the story unmercifully.

In September of 1898, a Boston critic said, in contrast to Mr. Winter's statement, "Nearly the whole triumph of the thing is due to Miss Adams. Her gay mischievousness, her sudden dashes and spirit of coquetry, her consciousness of her woman's power and helplessness of the little minister, her gift at swift dryness of speech, and with and through all her quaint and taking personality which gives to every word and movement pretty girlish piquancy and grace . . . [At times] Miss Adams touches a string with a longer and deeper vibration. Her drollery is infectious, . . . her rare grace and personal charm leave no doubt over the secret of her success. Her Babbie is thoroughly and completely a success of personality."<sup>32</sup>

Lewis Strang wrote of her performance in 1902, "Babbie was to us some dear friend, a cherished companion, whom we loved very much, whom we wished always with us, whose happiness was our greatest pleasure, whose sorrows awoke in us keenest sympathy; a friend whom we felt that we

<sup>31</sup>William C. Young, Famous Actors and Actresses of the American Stage, Vol. I, A-J (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1975), p. 6.

<sup>32</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 43.

could trust to the end of time, who never disappointed us or wounded us, who never fell from our ideal, who returned sentiment for sentiment, who inspired us to look up and seek beyond, whose sympathy was rich, full, and complete, whose influence was ennobling, purifying and broadening."<sup>33</sup>

One reviewer suggested: Babbie is not the wild barbarian of beauty and luminous emotion . . . [The Frohman Babbie not Barrie's novel Babbie] is an awkward little lady who is a charming blend of mischief and sympathy . . . [She] demurely flirts . . . does a lot of semi-respectable things and frolics daintily like an irresponsible kitten. . . . Maude Adams's witcheries, her indescribable magnetism and personality are fascinations most sought."<sup>34</sup>

Maude felt that this part was especially conceived for her and enjoyed the character. Her personality was the basis for her characterization of Babbie. The portrayal was gay, lively, and mischievous. Yet she was able to convey the sensitivity, helplessness and dainty qualities of Lady Babbie. No depth of passion or force characterized her portrayal, but her agile and spritely changes of mood added variance to her role. It was the type of character that helped her achieve the magnetic qualities that packed theaters across the country. Maude was enjoying herself as Lady Babbie, a saucy, sometimes quaint, fun loving, and impetuous girl.

As the popularity of the play spread across the country, Clergymen encouraged their congregations to see the play, and cigars, children and

<sup>33</sup>Lewis Strang, Famous Actresses of the Day in America, 2nd Series (Boston: L. C. Page, 1902), p. 55.

<sup>34</sup>Amy Leslie, pp. 371-372.



corsets were named for Maude and her successful Babbie. She did The Little Minister 1200 times during her tenure with Frohman. Yet she seemed as fresh for the 900th performance as she had been for the 3rd; so said numerous devotees who saw her perform Lady Babbie several times. She truly enjoyed her work, which she felt was an essential element if one wanted to please the public as well as oneself.

After several years of portraying Lady Babbie, Maude felt she needed to broaden her horizons. The one character Maude had dreamed of playing was Juliet. She had never done Shakespeare, but Frohman mounted a production for her in May of 1899. Maude had studied the part for years but her success was limited. She said of her own performances, "I know I was very bad as Juliet. I had thought I was going to be, and that did not help much, but it did seem as if I might have been better than I was."<sup>35</sup> In further discussion of the play she said, "We put the play on exactly as if it were a new manuscript accepted by Mr. Frohman for production." His constant admonition was "Get it from your heart. We want this to be human, sympathetic and heart throbbing."<sup>36</sup>

One New York critic was kind, describing her Juliet as "simple, spontaneous, unaffected girlhood. It is rich in romantic charm and great viewed from the standpoint of comedy. It is finely emotional and intensely appealing on its tragic side, although the element of deep pathos is substituted for moving force. It is the Juliet of a comedienne."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 53.

<sup>36</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, p. 55.

In Boston a critic of her Juliet said, "It was absolutely new . . . [Her] Juliet is the most girlish, the most tender, the most lovable, the most sympathetic, the most human and the most convincing."<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately hers was not Juliet in a traditional sense, for she had transformed Juliet into a silly, comedic part with no depth but melodramatic pathos to carry her to the end.

William Winter in the Tribune said, "Miss Adams was a delicate, fragile and febrile person in the potion scene, and supplied a mild specimen of hysterics. The individual charm of girl-like sincerity which is peculiar to Miss Adams swayed her performance with a winning softness, eliciting sympathy and inspiring kindness. Beyond that there was nothing. Many school girls, with a little practice would play the part as well and be just as little like it . . . Much of the part was whispered and much of it was bleated . . . [like] a young lady from Boston . . . intent on teaching pedagogy. A balcony scene without passion, a parting scene without delirium of grief, and a potion scene without power--those were the products of Miss Adams' dramatic art."<sup>39</sup>

Some critics disliked the fact that there was no stately declamation of the old school of Shakespearean actors. They wanted her to get some elocution lessons as soon as possible. The classics were not her forte and she knew it, yet she was not afraid to try new vistas of achievement.

On October 22, 1900 Miss Adams opened at the Knickerbocher Theatre in

<sup>38</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, p. 56.

Edmond Rostand's L'Aiglon, a play outmoded soon after writing because of its heavy emphasis on pathos and sentimentality. She played Napoleon's frail son, the eaglet with clipped wings. In her acting of the role Maude achieved the pathos and pathetic nature of his situation. But some of the critics felt she lacked self-assurance in her part. Sarah Bernhardt was appearing as the same character, but in the original French. William Winter seeing both commented "Sarah Bernhardt, in contrast with Maude Adams, suggested the leopard alongside the kitten."<sup>40</sup> He felt Maude's presentation was weak and ineffectually acted compared to Bernhardt.

Another reviewer suggested that "The great scenes lay far beyond her, but she brought out the pathos of the life of the poor little eaglet of Napoleon's with so much delicacy and tenderness that she carried her audience away with her."<sup>41</sup> Here she was able to capture the sensitivity of the story with great sympathy, but she was very weak vocally, and physically she did not have the strength of a strong body. Elfin qualities and nimbleness were not enough to sustain her weak interpretation of the character. Other critics felt that Maude was most convincing in the early parts of the play, where her own personality came through.

A New York critic said, "In the early scenes she so completely fascinated the audience by her own personality that when the great scenes came she had her hearers completely in her power."<sup>42</sup>

Acton Davies suggested that she was at her best in the opening with

<sup>40</sup>William Winter, The Wallet of Time (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1913; rpt. 1969), p. 527.

<sup>41</sup>Acton Davies, p. 96.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, p. 96.

her tutor, but later her cough was too much and too often, and reminded one of a second rate Camille.<sup>43</sup> The play rather than Maude carried her through to the curtain calls. Apparently in Act III she relied too heavily on facial by-play which was exceedingly distracting. Her elocution was the low point of the play. Her sweet little birdlike trill was not suited to the play or the character. The New York Times reviewer said, "In the closing act, the death scene, her acting was entirely conventional and she lost the grip which she had upon her audience earlier in the play."<sup>44</sup> The American version that Frohman was using was too sympathetic and syrupy. The critics were most impressed with Maude's costumes which she had designed herself.

The play was carried over the rough segments by Maude's many costume changes: the careful tailoring and fine materials that had been used were noted. Maude looked so delicate yet so much like a boy that the combination of costume and physical appearance added greatly to her portrayal of the frail young lad.

Amy Leslie in describing Maude at this time in her life suggests that Maude's distinct femininity was her dominant charm. Her face was sensitive and her large eyes seemed to smile even when she wasn't. Her lips were delicate with dimples described as bewitching. Her expressive face and intelligent look saved her from being ugly, for her neck was long and thin and her nose was rather large. "She entirely lacks every line of beauty; neverthe-

<sup>43</sup>Acton Davies, p. 96.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, p. 101.

less she is lovely . . . Her teeth shine, her eyes glow, her voice ripples musically. [Physically] she is a scrawny awkward girl . . . She has not Bernhardt's combination of thinness and leonine force of grace, her lithe elegance, or her animal suppleness. Miss Adams is simply a bony young woman who tries very hard to use her feet and hands as if they were not hinged on wires, and in the discreetly arranged success of Miss Adams's concealment of what she lacks lies the secret of her commendable triumphs. She is an appealing, direct, and soothing artist . . . She has a certain originality of mode and a formidable package of arch coquetties which are rooted cunningly in her personality."<sup>45</sup>

Maude's career was well established by 1900 and her fans clamored for news of her personal views and private life. But Maude guarded her privacy diligently, granting no interviews to anyone of the press. Frohman supported her in her secrecy, feeling that creating a mysterious star was good for business. Maude, for very different reasons, wanted her privacy. She abhorred gossip and never allowed it in her presence. Less was known about Maude than any other actress on the American stage during this time, and she was very pleased with that fact. Because she was so shy, crowds of people bothered her. She never went to plays, concerts, or parties, but sought the privacy and sanctity of her home. Her bedroom in fact was the exact model of a convent cell, with only a bed, a chair, and a small lamp. She said this room gave her a safe cloistered feeling after the rigors of performing. Her opinion concerning privacy from the public was

<sup>45</sup> Amy Leslie, pp. 370-371.

"I have no theories and systems of bathing, exercise, and dressing to interest people with. I ride horseback and walk . . . I don't see anyway why an actress must give her personality to the world, though it seems to be expected and those who curiously investigate her private life are not always careful how they use their information."<sup>46</sup>

On November 11, 1901, Maude advanced her stage career by opening in J. M. Barrie's Quality Street. "It is an exquisite bit," said the New York Sun, "played with infinite grace and pathos."<sup>47</sup> The New York Tribune said, "Miss Adams is once more her seemingly ingenuous self . . . an innocent and lovely girl, artless, bouyant, piquant, brisk."<sup>48</sup> In Boston one critic said, "This little lady has faults in her methods and mannerisms which stand out glaringly," but he then went on to praise her dancing ability, saying "she was as light as the thistle down, and as graceful as a young faun."<sup>49</sup>

It was during this play that her health began to fade and rumors were rampant about her ill-health. The rumors grew very wild, exaggerated and out of all proportion, causing much unnecessary concern among her fans. Maude played a busy season of seven performances a week. But in the summer she was able to get away to Europe or the Far East. She enjoyed playing the student and getting a rest at the same time. After the run of Quality Street, Maude had decided she was through at thirty, saying that the public who adored her had had enough. "I had no freshness, no spontaneity,

<sup>46</sup>Acton Davies, p. 108.

<sup>47</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup>William Winter, p. 520.

<sup>49</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 66.

my mannerisms were becoming more and more marked and objectionable."<sup>50</sup>

Maude took a year off in 1902 and went to Egypt, also spending time at her Long Island home. In 1903 she was back at the Empire Theatre in New York opening on November 9 in The Pretty Sister of Jose, an adaptation of a novel by Frances Burnett. After a year's illness and absence, her return to the stage proved to be discouraging, for the play was not a success. She toured in the West with The Little Minister in 1904 which seemed to lift her spirits. In April 1905 she appeared in 'Op o' Me Thumb' which opened in Boston. For a reception it received this review: "It is a most pathetic little picture that one carries away in the mind after seeing Miss Adams in 'Op o' Me Thumb'. Crouching under the table, as the curtain descends, the actress portrays every pang of despair, of utter wretchedness and of absolute desolation that the unloved, unloved woman feels tearing at her heart. Miss Adams proved herself the devoted and consummate actress; if she were anything short of that she would hesitate to enter into such a character, and make herself so pitifully unattractive, with anaemic skin, shuffling gait, scrawny figure and thin hair--how she flattens out her own fine locks is a mystery--terminating in an unkempt pug."<sup>51</sup>

Johnson Briscoe in Twenty Years of the Empire said, "Miss Adams's work in the dramatic fragment will long remain one of the most effective things she has ever done. It was the acme of genuine pathos, a most moving

<sup>50</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 75.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid, pp. 87-88.

and telling portrayal of unhappy girlhood."<sup>52</sup>

Maude's success in 'Op o' Me Thumb' was only the tip of the iceberg in her popularity compared to the depth of love and devotion waiting for her in Peter Pan. Although Maude was not the first to portray the role of Peter Pan, some correspondence from Barrie indicates that Maude inspired it, and she insisted he wrote it for her. Barrie feared American audiences would not respond to the story, finding it too unusual, odd, and fantastic. The idea of a boy never wanting to grow up was perhaps not too odd, but having a whole group of boys lost, finding a home in Never Never Land, and then flying around was a bit much to swallow. A spritely, invisible fairy like Tinker Bell was too silly for the sophisticated critics to handle. Pirates, Indians, homeless boys, and kidnapped children proved to be a confusing group for the public and the reviewers. Alexander Woollcott in The New Yorker on December 19, 1931, credits Maude with the play's ultimate success: "Only such a one could . . . have saved the new-born Peter Pan from being the dire failure which the managers, the critics, and the public at first so confidently regarded it."<sup>53</sup> Other critics mention the audiences' puzzlement with the whimsical element of the play.

The first reviews should have sent the play to the morgue. Alexander Woollcott in Shouts and Murmurs mentions the reviews of two critics. One of the critic's view was: "a conglomeration of balderdash, cheap melodrama and third-rate extravaganza . . . For an artist of Maude Adams' standing

<sup>52</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 88.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, p. 90.



this play seems like a waste of time."<sup>54</sup> If this type of enthusiasm was not enough to ground Peter Pan, another reviewer after opening night cut the support wires even further: "It was a pity to see Miss Adams, with her delightful gifts, wasting herself on such drivel."<sup>55</sup>

Once the play caught on though, the theaters were always filled to capacity. The Red Book commented, "The audiences during the first fortnight in New York were large, but then they always are when Miss Adams presents a new bill."<sup>56</sup> The first month some evening seats were vacant but matinees were sold out completely, even breathing room was a premium. By the second month no seat at any performance was left vacant.

Peter Pan opened in Washington, going on to Frohman's Empire Theatre in New York on November 6, 1905. "Maude Adams wore a tunic and breeches of her own devising, a hat with a feather in it, and a boyish touch of white at the throat which was to become known to the future as the 'Peter Pan collar'."<sup>57</sup> Some English critics disliked what they referred to as nauseous and obvious stage tricks; one of which was having the audience clap its hands if it believed in fairies. This was not in the original version of the play, but was added by Maude in New York. It was later added by Barrie to the script as a direction in the published version, proving that critics were probably never children.<sup>58</sup>

In describing Maude's portrayal of Peter Pan, Eugene Burr, writing in

<sup>54</sup>Alexander Woolcott, pp. 187-188.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid, p. 189.

<sup>56</sup>William C. Young, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup>Janet Dunbar, p. 176.

<sup>58</sup>W. A. Darlington, J. M. Barrie (London: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1974), p. 102.

The Theater said, "he (Peter) will always be identified with Miss Adams, whose delicate and sensitive charm first gave him life . . . and made him one of the great modern myth-figures of the English-speaking world."<sup>59</sup>

The New York Daily Tribune critic called her "a sprightly presence, indicative of sweetness and mirth, and graced by the allurements of pretty ways. As an actress, Miss Adams is incarnate mediocrity--for she possesses neither imagination, passion, power, depth of feeling, or formidable intellect, and her faculty of expressive impersonation is extremely limited; but as a personality she is piquant, interesting and agreeable, and, in such a play as Peter Pan, which is an amiable fabric of whim and fancy, devised for the amusement of children, she is shown to advantage."<sup>60</sup>

The terms that were used to describe Maude throughout her career followed her with Peter Pan. She was sensitive, sweet, spritely, elfin, and filled with mirth. To escape Captain Hook's pirates, Maude needed agility and a graceful carriage to add smoothness to her portrayal. Her boyish physical appearance was perfect for Peter and her personality blended with Peter's shyness and reserved nature when dealing with Wendy, his only female runaway, whom he lured to be a mother to the homeless boys. Louise Boynton, writing in Century Magazine in 1906, suggested that Peter Pan was "embodied by a woman beautiful in life and thought, with the soul of an artist and the heart of a child."<sup>61</sup> Miss Boynton felt that for Maude playing Peter was not acting a role at all, but embodying a spirit and

<sup>59</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 106.

<sup>60</sup>Roger Lancelyn Green, Fifty Years of Peter Pan (London: Peter Davies, 1954), p. 159.

<sup>61</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 93.

thought from a child's viewpoint.

Mark Twain wrote to Maude saying "It is my belief that Peter Pan is a great and refining and uplifting benefaction to this sordid and money-mad age; and that the next best play on the boards is a long way behind it as long as you play Peter."<sup>62</sup>

For Maude it was like reliving the childhood she had never had. It opened the world of children to her. As a child she had never known other children. As Peter she could enter their magical world and play their games. Their shouts from the audience at the arrival of Captain Hook spurred her to enjoy the part all the more. She loved to hear them cheer Peter on to new feats and victories. Ruth Gordon was one of the children in Peter's band of homeless boys, and she was greatly impressed by Maude Adams. Maude enjoyed the children in the company too, and the adult cast members joined in the frivolity. She received hundreds of letters from children who invited her to lunch and asked that she bring Tinker Bell. Some children sent money for fairy dust and asked for flying instructions. With such ardent fans, it is not difficult to see why Maude was so deeply enmeshed in Peter's character, especially since there was so much Peter in Maude, waiting to burst out.

The play was in essence the catalyst that ingrained in thousands of American memories that Maude was Peter Pan. It made her an American institution for many years. Peter Pan became a national vogue, clothing was labeled with his name, children were named for various characters and all

<sup>62</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 90.

kinds of souvenirs abounded. Maude became Peter Pan for millions of Americans across the country. She did not retire from the part until 1915. Since the mania became so strong, it is hard to believe that as it opened various critics had unkind things to say.

She played Peter Pan over 1500 times. Her touring company had a specially built box car with a full stage, lighting, equipment, and all the necessities for rehearsing the play. Unfortunately touring meant sleeping seven nights a week, on a train, eating poor food in strange places, performing in antiquated theaters with narrow stages, and poor facilities, and every kind of inconvenience imaginable. Those who knew Maude felt that she was as warm, sincere, and pleasant offstage as on, "a real trouper."

After three seasons of Peter Pan, Maude appeared in The Jesters, opening January 13 of 1908 at the Empire Theatre in New York. It was a play translated from the French about a dashing young nobleman disguised as a jester with a hump on his back. The story takes place in a remote valley in sixteenth century France. The New York Times said of her performance: "Miss Adams herself, playing with a fine sense of delicate values, gave to the figure of Chicot the charm of youth, high spirits, and sympathetic sensibility. She was a picture to look upon in a costume of gold cloth, her trim and slender little figure moving lithely and gracefully through the play."<sup>63</sup> Other critics described her as dexterous

<sup>63</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 120.

and with a playfulness of spirit.

From The Jesters and the part of a young nobleman in a disguise, Maude now moved into another disguise as a young woman pretending to be a man. The English Department of Harvard University invited her to give a comedy by Shakespeare on June 3rd and 4th of 1908. Finally Twelfth Night was chosen. The Boston Transcript said, "In many respects the part is well suited to Maude Adams. There is a simplicity and girlishness in Viola which the actress portrayed so charmingly that even when she did not thoroughly grasp the character, one could forget it on account of the grace and sweetness which throughout characterized her impersonation. She was full to the brim with fun and merriment, and her adventures in boy's attire were simply one prolonged lark in which she was enjoying herself."<sup>64</sup>

On December 23, 1908 she opened in Barrie's What Every Woman Knows. The New York critics felt she was admirable as Maggie. "She manifested a splendid conception of the character, and its native sweetness expressed itself delightfully in her sympathetic personality."<sup>65</sup> They liked her suppressed agony of spirit and her gentle martyrdom.

Walter Prichard Eaton, the critic, felt that "Even in the plays of her favorite Barrie, she sometimes curiously fails to grasp a character as in the earlier acts of What Every Woman Knows." He said further that many parts she attempted were beyond her range. Yet she packed houses across the country. He felt she was so rewarded because of her personality

<sup>64</sup>Phyllis Robbins, pp. 122-123.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, p. 132.

rather than her art. "A personality so winsome and lovely as hers is itself a work of genius--be it the Lord's or not. Miss Adams, of course, knows how to act, up to a certain point. But her range is limited. She speaks very badly, her attempts at Shakespeare were almost pathetic, and she mispronounces the English language atrociously . . . There is something in her personality everybody recognizes, everybody loves, and when she finds a part to which she can give illusion, an elfin part . . . with a dash of tenderness and womanly humor and wistfulness now and then--she is incomparable. She makes her slender technical resources go as far as they can."<sup>66</sup>

The New York Daily Tribune on December 24, 1908, commented on her performance in the play What Every Woman Knows.

Miss Adams gave a proficient, serio-comic, sometimes pathetic performance, representing, in a distinctly American manner, a peculiar and interesting Scotch girl . . . There is not, and there never has been, in the acting of Miss Adams, any attribute or quality of a phenomenal or even an extraordinary character. It shows, and it always has shown, talent, refinement, sensibility, perception, and the winning charm of a nature at once resolute and gentle, piquant and demure. At this time, naturally, it shows the results of long continued professional experience.

Miss Adams entered thoroughly into the spirit of . . . Maggie Wylie--the spirit which combines goodness, tenderness, magnanimity, pride, motherhood, and pity with some dashes of tartness--and gave a performance which only needs flexibility and more essentially Scotch character to make it . . . artistically consistent . . . Miss Adams attained to the loftiest height she has, professionally, reached in the expression of feeling . . ."<sup>67</sup>

In the spring of 1809 Maude presented What Every Woman Knows at Yale, making a gift of the gross receipts to the Yale University Building Fund. She hired the theater, paid the actors' salaries, and paid the transportation

<sup>66</sup>Walter Prichard Eaton, Plays and Players: Leaves from a Critic's Scrapbook (Cincinnati: Stewart and Kidd Company, 1916), pp. 388-389.

<sup>67</sup>William C. Young, p. 7.

of company and scenery to and from New York.

January 23, 1911, hailed the opening at the Knickerbocker Theatre of Chantecler, a play about barnyard fowl and homely, domestic animals that have feelings and passions of human beings. Maude had the title role in the first English production with the translation by Louis N. Parker. The play concerns those who believe they are called to play a master part in life. Chantecler, the rooster, is firmly convinced that the sun rises each morning when he crows. Gradually he learns that it rises without his assistance. He does learn his usefulness in the fact that he does announce the dawn of a new day. When the curtain went up on the first performance, a gasp was heard over the audience. Chantecler, played by Maude, jumped the garden wall and exhibited an iridescent breast, a greenish black tail, and a majestic comb. The effect was very exciting. Although Maude loved Peter Pan, the role of Chantecler became her favorite after 1911 and remained her favorite for the rest of her life. She loved Chantecler's conceit and cockiness, his fall from grace, and his return to an awareness of life's meaning and worth for all human beings.

Maude's next role, The Legend of Leonora, opened January 5, 1914, another Barrie play for Maude and another complicated story to swallow. The play begins with a dinner to which a man and six women are invited; one is a murderess. The audience soon discovers it is Maude, but she is quick to explain. "She was in a railroad carriage with her little girl, and a horrid man wouldn't shut the window when she asked him to, so she pushed him out on the tracks (the train is going at high speed) and shut the window

herself. Of course, anybody can realize there was nothing else for her to do, because her little girl had a cold." A trial ensues ala burlesque style. "To Play [the trial] effectively of course, you must have an actress who, herself, has a personality full of charm, a personality everybody loves, to whose spell everybody yields. There are a score of actresses who could have played Act I of this comedy better than Miss Adams--who indeed plays it very badly . . . But she and she alone could play the courtroom scene and deliver its full message."<sup>68</sup>

When the play was produced in London under the title of The Adored One, it was booed off the stage. The play was "utterly preposterous" and had no plausibility. It was silly to the point of being ridiculous, said the London critics and not one actress in ten thousand could carry it off. The first act was originally written as a one act play. Even Barrie said the play was awful and was sorry he had wasted his time on it. In a letter to Frohman in November of 1913 Barrie said, "If Miss Adams can make a success of it, it will be the biggest triumph she has ever given me, and if she does not I'm very certain no other person can."<sup>69</sup> Make a success of it is what Maude did! The critics said, "It is one of her best parts. In the scenes in the courtroom there are moments of intense naturalness that give point to Barrie's burlesque. The actress's personal appeal is the more winning because she is so often content to let the part play itself."<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup>Walter Prichard Eaton, pp. 174-177.

<sup>69</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 156.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid, p. 156.



Another reviewer said, "Never has she so conspicuously demonstrated her unique ability as in this case . . . and never . . . has Barrie been so indebted to Miss Adams for her share in making his work count."<sup>71</sup> The critics liked her womanliness, her delicate touches, her humor, and her tenderness. This was hard to believe since London audiences booed the play off the stage, and Barrie himself didn't like it. Maude had an uncanny knack for taking unusual parts, parts that others did not want, or could not do, and making them work. She played waifs, silly burlesque female roles, and a rooster; the critics were amazed by her sympathy and simplicity in all her roles. It is safe to say that Maude must not have been acting at all a great portion of the time, but letting her own sweet personality expand and carry her through. Her thoroughness in each element of her plays also added immensely to her success. If flowers were needed for a touch, fresh ones were used each day. She designed her costumes carefully, showing her concern for detail and neatness. Maude made sure that all the actors in her company were prepared with parts learned, props in hand, and entrances noted. The makeup was carefully applied and the fit of her costumes from shoes to hat was a special concern. Detailed analysis of the physical appearance of her character was important to Maude. Most importantly, she was fascinated by, and was a real stickler on the lighting of her shows. After she retired from the stage she spent hours studying new ideas in lighting at the General Electric laboratories in Schenectady, New

<sup>71</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 159.

York. She had a natural flair for lighting techniques, a mechanical bent, and a good sense for color--all of which had helped her and her stage managers create some unique staging effects.

Some serious events occurred in 1915 and 1916 to dampen the spirit of Maude's smoothly running career. On May 7, 1915, news arrived that Mr. Frohman had gone down to his death on the torpedoed Lusitania. Her stage manager, Allen Fawcett also died the same year. Maude continued, but Frohman had always guided her as a conductor orchestrates a score. She felt lost and lacked a steering mechanism, and her career started to slowly wind down. In December of 1915 her strong and stalwart grandmother passed away. Still another blow was to strike in March of 1916 when her mother died.

The fall of 1915 and the spring of 1916 found her touring new revivals of Quality Street and The Little Minister. She had no trouble filling theaters and pleasing her devoted audiences. She still had the same pleasant qualities which had sustained her for twenty years. The girlish exuberance was still very much a part of her personality, even though she was forty-three and, as she described herself, a middle aged spinster.

The late spring of 1916 found Maude in Madison at the University of Wisconsin, accepting an honorary degree. Because of a complicated mixup she was not the only actress receiving an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. The other actress was Minnie Maddern Fiske, the woman who had held out and fought valiantly against the Theater Trust of 1896. Charles Frohman and his associates banded together to prevent those outside

the syndicate from producing plays. The syndicate tied up theaters across the country and non members were forced to appear in very uncomfortable and ill-equipped buildings. There on the platform also stood Maude Adams, the darling and ardent supporter of the Trust and of the man behind it, Charles Frohman. Mrs. Fiske, commenting on the occasion said, "When we reached the spot there was dear little Maude Adams (we were to march one behind the other). She grasped my hand and said in her halting way, 'this is much more terrible than a first night--isn't it?'-- I said, 'no!'"<sup>72</sup>

Mrs. Fiske felt uncomfortable and must have had a twinge of animosity for she rose to accept her award as she thought, "In effect we now turned away from the world of fancies and whimsies and dreams and fantasy where Miss Adams lived, to the real realities."<sup>73</sup>

The Christmas holidays of 1916 found Maude opening in her last Barrie play, A Kiss for Cinderella. She played the same type of character as she had in 'Op o' Me Thumb', an extremely homely drudge who blossoms into a beauty. The Boston Transcript felt that she was so captivating that if she were to read the City Directory theater-goers would flock to hear her. Alexander Woolcott in The New York Times said of her performance, "Maude Adams is utterly winsome, so dauntless and gently pathetic that she almost breaks your heart."<sup>74</sup> She toured in Cinderella during 1917 and 1918.

<sup>72</sup>Archie Binns, Mrs. Fiske and the American Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1955), p. 354.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid, p. 355.

<sup>74</sup>Phyllis Robbins, p. 178.

Maude's name was Jane in the play. She pretended she was Cinderella to break the boredom and bleak existence of her London slum life. She cleaned by day but cared for four orphans at night, telling them the famous fairy tale. The story line becomes impossibly sentimental and complicated. Woollcott said of her in Shouts and Murmurs, "She is so preposterously gay and perky in her 'brave apparel of the very poor.' She is so absurdly cheerful, when she has no earthly business to be . . . that Miss Adams expressed to your heart's content [her affection]."<sup>75</sup>

Some biographers say that she intended to retire in 1918 after A Kiss for Cinderella, while others feel that she planned to continue, but took time to help in the efforts of American forces to bring W. W. I to a swift conclusion. If the war indeed interrupted her career, apparently she did plan to open in Mary Rose, by Barrie, in 1920. Woollcott announced the date of the opening, but Frohman, Inc. had a very trickily worded contract for her and she did not sign. The part went to Ruth Chatterton. Thus ended Maude's acting days except for short spurts and starts. She had invested her money wisely from the very first year of star success in The Little Minister. That year she made \$40,000, quite a sum for a twenty-five year old woman, in 1897, before the days of high taxes.

Although she suffered with various bouts of fatigue during her career and was held up by snow, broken-down trains, and other emergencies, Maude never missed a performance in her entire career."<sup>76</sup> Throughout her

<sup>75</sup>Alexander Woollcott, p. 206.

<sup>76</sup>Daniel Blum, Great Stars of the American Stage (New York: Greenberg, 1952), p. 7.

life she was immensely proud of that fact. Such devotion to her work added to the devotion that her followers felt for her.

Garff Wilson placed her in the "Sisterhood of Sweetness and Light" in his book, A History of American Acting. "Maude Adams . . . was the top money-making star in the entire United States. During her most active years, the public paid over a million and one half dollars to see her in Chicago and Boston, while almost twice as much was spent in New York City."<sup>77</sup>

It is difficult to imagine what Maude Adams had to attract so much attention. It was obviously not her physical beauty, for she was thin and boyish in physical stature, and her facial features were not those of a beautiful woman. Yet there was a sparkle in the eyes and a warmth that exuded from her face. Her shyness gave her a delicacy of manner that made her appear graceful and dainty. For example, when she appeared as Suzanne in The Masked Ball, she carried a rose with her that she used gracefully moving it from one hand to the other. Although she was not a glamorous person, the beauty and delicacy of the rose was transferred to her portrayal of the character. This shyness and delicacy were often portrayed using one particular prop that would help her define and identify the character. It also helped the audience solidify its conception of a particular character she played. Because her life was such a quiet and private one, Maude always preferred sentimental and tender roles, avoiding those of a highly passionate nature where she would show hate, extreme anger or any character who lived on the seamy side of life. Instead she enjoyed those

<sup>77</sup> Garff Wilson, A History of American Acting (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 146.

roles that were girl-like, playful, elfin, and of a fanciful nature. Her characters were usually simple and unworldly folk, caught in the sympathetic struggles of daily existence. She conveyed a genuineness and sincerity that was pervasive. No adverse publicity ever toppled her from the pedestal where the public placed her.

Maude had a knack for enjoying herself while performing, evidently appealing to the audience's sense of fun to join her or weep for her in a pathetic situation. She was apparently able to conceal her weakness as an actress of depth and power by being girlish, spontaneous, charming, and coquetish in her manner.

Maude was weak in a physical sense but conveyed enough energy and spirit to play roles like Peter Pan that took some agility. She studied dancing as an adult and had certainly viewed enough performances in her youth to put herself across in a physical sense. Her voice, described as weak, was also bird-like, and it had a rippling effect. Her diction was not the best, but the warmth of her voice evidently compensated for her lack of power and strength.

Maude portrayed optimism, goodness, virtue, energy, and eternal youth. She was pure and untainted, and the public at the turn of the century must certainly have needed these virtues. She chose roles that embodied these attributes, and she could convey them, for they were her own personal attributes and virtues. They were her personality which she gave to her public who found her unique.

Maude was not a lazy person, for she studied the classics extensively, spoke fluent French, and played the harp, piano, and flute. She was no

finishing school product, but a woman who had pulled herself up by her bootstraps and worked for what she achieved, and the public surely recognized that fact.

What makes a great actress?

In the annals of theater history many actresses could be brought to mind who embody various aspects of acting talent. Maude Adams never appeared in an Ibsen, Strindberg or Chekhov play, nor did she appear in any realistic or symbolic plays. Maude Adams was not a deeply psychological actress, or a great one. What was she?

Maude was a phenomenon of late 19th and early 20th centuries. She was an overly protected child who desired to please her mother by exhibiting expertise on the stage. She learned to need and want the applause and to feel that acting was the career for her. She lacked the fantastic attributes of other actresses. She was slight, frail, shy, and reserved in public. Yet on the stage she had a simple sweetness, and genuine kind of empathy that extended across the footlights to the audience. She was sincere and sympathetic. She was, while on the stage, an embodiment of all that she was as a young girl. The cockiness of the pre-teen years and the self-consciousness of the teen years blended together to create a pleasant and genuinely warm person that the audience could sense was real. She could portray pathos of varying degrees, but could sustain no deep moving emotion. Maude had a sprightly elfin manner about her and that, coupled with a warm sincerity, made light comedy her forte. Although the critics expected much more from an actress, the audience seemed to love her just the way she was: someone wholesome and sweet, but willing to put forth a

great deal of energy to give the audience their money's worth. She was totally dedicated to what she did and how she did it. She was not a publicity monger, and because of this she became somewhat of a mystery personality, which drew more people to her, hoping for some glimmer of the personality beyond the facade. As far as her personality was concerned, Maude was Maude to a great extent on the stage. She broadened her shyness into coquetry and heightened it with her inner sweetness. To overcome her self-consciousness, she became elfin, cute, and sprightly on stage. Maude took her personality--the good and bad, and blew herself up like a balloon, to float across the stage and into people's hearts.

Maude felt what she created was art, and if art is defined as dedication, servitude, or immersion in one's work, Maude was indeed an artist.



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MAUDE ADAMS: HER LIFE AND CAREER

by

SARA ELLEN WHEATLEY RODERER

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

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## MASTER'S REPORT ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report has been to provide the basic information for what was the developmental process of Maude Adams' successful career as an actress. Included are reviews from various publications and personal glimpses provided by Miss Adams herself, and those who knew her well. A cohesive lineage of development from her birth in 1872 to her retirement from the stage in 1920 is included.

Maude Adams was an American actress who reached the pinnacle of her stage career in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She was a child actress whose youthful experiences helped her mold a unique talent. Because she was a very private person as an adult, the public clamored for news about her personal life.

Maude rose to the zenith of her career in the plays of James M. Barrie. To millions of Americans, she was Peter Pan from 1905 to 1915. This character of Barrie's was one of Maude's favorite roles. Lady Babbie in Barrie's The Little Minister was also one of her most important parts. These two roles among others are shown as examples of the pervasive warmth, sincerity, elfin magic, and spritely joyfulness she gave to all her performances. Her acting style was largely a product of her wholesome natural personality which made her the highest paid actress in America at the turn of the century. The reviewers were often critical of her lack of depth in portraying passion or the more intricate elements of some of her roles. Yet the public was devoted to the goodness and uplifting spirit they saw in her career.