

# Trelawny of the Wells

by Arthur Wing Pinero

## Student-Teacher Study Guide

compiled and arranged by  
the Education Department of  
The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

## In This Guide:

Classroom Activities for Teachers and Students .....	p2
<i>Trelawny of the Wells</i> : A Brief Introduction .....	p3
Who's Who in <i>Trelawny of the Wells</i> .....	p5
Director's Notes.....	p6
About the Playwright: Arthur Wing Pinero .....	p8
Selected Works.....	p9
Pinero's Process.....	p9
Commentary and Criticism .....	p10
Terms and Phrases in <i>Trelawny of the Wells</i> .....	p11
Theatre of the Era.....	p12
Production History .....	p13
Further Reading.....	p13
"Who Said That?" Quiz .....	p14
"Test Your Understanding" Quiz .....	p15
About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.....	back cover



# CLASSROOM •

## FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Some of the principal goals of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's education programs is to demystify the classics, take them "off the shelf" and re-energize them for students and teachers alike. Toward these goals, this study guide provides educators with tools to both allay their own concerns and to expand the theatre-going experience for their students beyond the field trip to The Shakespeare Theatre.

The information included in this guide will help you expand your students' understanding of the classics in performance, as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this Study Guide to your students as is possible. The following are some **suggestions from teachers** on how you can utilize elements of the guide given limited classroom time.

- Many teachers have found that distributing or reading the Short Synopsis and Who's Who pages has greatly increased students' understanding and enjoyment of the production. It provides the students with a general understanding of what they will be seeing and what they can expect. Some teachers have simply taken the last five minutes of a class period to do this with very positive results.
- When more class time is available prior to your visit, we recommend incorporating the background information on the author, the playwright and the play itself. One teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period.
- Using the questions found in the "TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION," many teachers will opt to take a class period *after* the trip to The Shakespeare Theatre to discuss the play with their students. The questions help keep the comments focused on the production, while incorporating various thematic and social issues that are found in the play.

Again, we hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the study guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about the classics and live theatre.

### "What's My Line?" Promoting Active Listening

Teacher-tested, student-approved!  
Try this exercise with your students:

Before attending the production, give each student one line from the novel/play to listen for. Discuss the meaning of the line and encourage their input in deciphering what the author and playwright meant by the line. How would the student perform the line? Why is the line important to the play? Does it advance the plot, or give the audience particular insight into a character or relationship?

Following the production, discuss the line again. Did the actor present the line in the way your student expected? If not, how was it different?

Happy Teaching,



Brian B. Crowe,  
Director of Education



The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's  
Main Stage, The F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre.

# ACTIVITIES

## *Trelawny of the Wells*: A Brief Introduction

Arthur Wing Pinero wrote *Trelawny of the Wells* in 1898 as a tribute to the theatre of his youth, the theatre that had enthralled him as a child and inspired his career, first as an actor and later as a playwright. He viewed it not only with nostalgia but also with a deep admiration for the playwrights who had worked to change the previous showy, stilted dramatic style into one that spoke to life as it really was, one that truly held the mirror up to nature. *Trelawny of the Wells* therefore is a love story, not only between Rose and Arthur, but also between artists and their art form. Pinero plays wittily but affectionately with character, with our sense of reality, and with the dangers of suppressing the art in our own lives compared to the rewards of nurturing it.

### Act I

*Trelawny of the Wells* opens with a tight-knit community of theatrical folk of the Sadler's Wells Theatre preparing to bid farewell to their greatest star, Rose Trelawny. Rose has become engaged to a member of the gentry and must leave "The Profession." All of her friends have gathered – the impetuous Avonia Bunn; the self-important Ferdinand Gadd; the old-guard

actors, the Telfers; the would-be playwright, Tom Wrench; the unfunny comedian Augustus Colpoys; and the successful Imogen Parrott. Imogen, who has moved on to the prestigious Olympic Theatre, learns that Tom is still struggling as an actor, getting only the smallest and worst parts. He writes plays, but no one is interested in their realistic style. Rose



Frontispiece from the script, as published in 1900.

enters the room and introduces everyone to her fiancé, Arthur, and tells how he fell in love with her upon seeing her perform the song "Ever of Thee." After Mr. Telfer's long-winded toasts, Rose is overcome by emotion and lets Arthur speak first. Arthur, no actor himself, stutters and trails off. Finally, Rose bids a tearful goodbye to her friends, saying she will remember them always and that her happiest moments will be when strangers recall her as "Trelawny of the Wells."

### Act II

Arthur's grandfather, Sir William Gower, and great-aunt, Trafalgar Gower, have insisted on a trial period for Rose, to see whether she is fit to enter higher society. Rose, however, finds the Gower household stifling – she is not allowed to be alone with Arthur, nor to play music or to sit on the floor or to do anything else "out of place." The Gowers have begun to despair of ever gentrifying Rose – they learn that she and Arthur have (horror of horrors!) held private conversations through her window at night, and, perhaps even worse, she dares to play the piano during Sir William's card game. After the household retires for the night, Rose's old theatre companions surprise her with a visit, to inform her of Avonia's marriage to Gadd. Having had a bit too much to drink, they get rowdy and rouse the family. Sir William is furious but Rose has had enough of the

### AN ACTOR'S WRITER

Arthur Pinero was famous for his "well-crafted" plays. Having been an actor himself for several years, Pinero knew how to write for actors. Norman Hapgood, a contemporary critic, wrote of him:

"Pinero . . . takes care of the actor, of his entrances, exits, speeches, and position on the stage, seldom leaving him stranded."

Nevertheless, working with Pinero could be difficult. He was very specific and autocratic about how his plays should be staged. Said actor Hesketh Pearson:

"He...pulls you up at particular places, after first giving you a hint that you were, all through, too quiet, and says: 'Ah, yes; this is where I want you to turn slightly to the left, walk slowly to a position exactly behind the centre of the sofa, three feet from it, put one hand in your right coat pocket, scratch the lower part of your chin with the other hand, and say "Oh!" three times . . .'"

Gowers and their rules and decides to leave then and there, despite her love for Arthur, and return to the Wells.

#### Act III

Back at the Wells, Rose is no longer the star she once was, as she is now unable to prance and pose in the conventional acting style of the time. She has gained the refinement of a lady after all. Tom insists that this is an improvement in her acting, but it does not fit the management's style and, after having reduced her salary, they fire her. Imogen returns, however, and cooks up a scheme with Tom to purchase and refurbish an old theatre and produce Tom's comedy there, with Rose in the lead. While Imogen is out looking for a financial backer and Tom for his script, Sir William comes to confront Rose about Arthur, who has disappeared. Rose knows nothing about his whereabouts. But a chance mention of the late great actor Edmund Kean arouses Sir William's interest, for he had seen Kean act when he was young. At the sudden entrance of Imogen and Tom, Sir William hides behind a screen. But after overhearing the situation – Imogen and Tom's plan, and how it's fallen to pieces because it turns out their prospective backer has died – he reemerges. Influenced by his recognition of the change in Rose and by the reawakening of his own long-dormant theatrical memories, Sir William offers to hear the play and perhaps replace this lost financial backer.

#### Act IV

Imogen and Tom, having succeeded in obtaining the theatre, are about to stage the first read-through of Tom's play, *Life*. There is no longer a place for the old, stagey Telfers in this changing theatrical world, but rather this is time for the new Rose to shine. Sir William, who has been troubled by the way one of the characters resembles his grandson, shows up to watch the rehearsal. As they read through the play, Arthur Gower arrives. It turns out that he has taken up acting and that Tom Wrench, who maintained correspondence with him, has cast him as Rose's lover in his play. Rose and Arthur are reunited, Arthur and Sir William are (somewhat) reconciled, and the rehearsal continues.

### ON THE SILVER SCREEN

In 1928, *Trelawny of the Wells* was made into a silent film starring Norma Shearer. The plot was changed significantly to focus on Arthur's courtship of Rose, an aspect mentioned only briefly in Pinero's script. The film begins with the troupe of actors suffering a carriage accident while out on an excursion; Arthur, who (unlike in the play) has no knowledge of or experience with the theatre, saves the group and falls for Rose. Critics agreed that the adaptation failed to preserve the spirit of the play, and it was not a great success.



Production stills from the 1898 New York premiere.

## Who's Who in *Trelawny of the Wells*

### THEATRICAL FOLKS:

**ROSE TRELAWNY** – a star ingenue actress who leaves the stage for love, only to find “respectable life” unbearable. Nevertheless, “real life” has changed her, better suiting her for the new, more natural style of theatre that her friend Tom Wrench envisions rather than for the old melodramas.

**TOM WRENCH** – an aspiring but unrecognized playwright who toils away as an actor in bit parts. Wrench strives for a new style of theatre, more natural and like real life.

**AVONIA BUNN** – a pantomime actress, and Rose’s good friend.

**IMOGEN PARROTT** – a successful actress who has left the Sadler’s Wells Theatre for the Olympic and later produces Tom Wrench’s play at the refurbished Pantheon Theatre.

**FERDINAND GADD** – Rose’s leading man at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre. He later weds Avonia; he has a certain fondness for alcohol.

**AUGUSTUS COLPOYS** – a comic actor at the Sadler’s Wells.

**JAMES TELFER** – the elder statesman of the Sadler’s Wells - the former leading man. The new style of theatre will have little place for this kind of actor.

**MRS. TELFER** – Mr. Telfer’s wife; a grande dame of the theatre and a former star herself.

**O’DWYER** – the overbearing stage manager for Wrench’s play at the Pantheon Theatre.

**MR. DENZIL, MISS BREWSTER** – actors at the Pantheon Theatre.

### THE THEATRES:

**SADLER’S WELLS THEATRE** – a London theatre specializing in popular melodrama; the theatrical home, at the beginning of the play, of Rose, Tom, Avonia, Gadd, Colpoys, and the Telfers.

**THE OLYMPIC THEATRE** – a fashionable West End theatre where Imogen performs after leaving the Wells.

**THE PANTHEON THEATRE** – the run-down theatre Imogen purchases and refurbishes, and in which she produces Tom’s play, *Life*.

### NON-THEATRICAL FOLKS:

**MRS. MOSSOP** – landlady for the theatrical folk.

**MR. ABLETT** – greengrocer and admirer of actors.

**SARAH** – a maid in Mrs. Mossop’s establishment.

### SOCIETY FOLKS:

**ARTHUR GOWER** – a young member of the gentry, who falls in love with Rose. He turns to the stage when the stifling atmosphere of the Gowers’ house drives Rose out.

**SIR WILLIAM GOWER** – Arthur’s grandfather, a curmudgeonly, demanding Vice-Chancellor who insists on very strict adherence to social conventions.

**TRAFALGAR GOWER** – Sir William’s sister; Arthur’s great-aunt.

**CLARA DE FOENIX** – Arthur Gower’s sister.

**CAPTAIN DE FOENIX** – Clara’s husband.

**CHARLES** – butler to the Gowers. He comes to Rose’s aid by letting her friends visit her under the cover of night.

#### FREDERIC WHYTE, *ACTORS OF THE CENTURY* (1898)

“... [Marie Wilton] made up her mind to have a theatre of her own. Only one theatre was possible for her, her capital amounted but to £1000, lent by her brother-in-law. This was the shabby little building in Tottenham Street, “a place of entertainment,” as M. Filon puts it, “where all sorts of things had been achieved, but bankruptcy oftenest of all,” where “the aristocratic seats were a shilling, and where the stalls, when they had dined well, were given to bombarding the boxes with orange peel.” It was popularly known as “The Dust Hole.” This squalid little play-house she set herself to transform, and soon it was the neatest and prettiest and most popular in London. ... They began with a production of H. J. Byron’s, but this proved unsatisfactory, and in November, 1865, “Cup and Saucer” Comedy came into life with T. W. Robertson’s first play, *Society*. It was a great success, and in due course was followed by very similar successes...”

### WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Pinero based some of his characters on real-life people. “Tom Wrench” was meant to be T. W. Robertson, who started the trend toward realistic theatre; “Imogen Parrott” was likely Marie Wilton, who opened the Prince of Wales’s Theatre where Robertson found his success; and “Arthur Gower” somewhat resembles Pinero himself in his defiant turn away from respectable life to work on the stage.

## Director's Notes

In 1982, I began my second season at the Williamstown Theatre Festival as the assistant to the artistic director. It was a dream job for an aspiring young director/artistic director, and one of its great perks was the opportunity to assist directors on the great classics. That season, my boss and mentor, the late Nikos Psacharopoulos, had decided to direct *Trelawny of the Wells*, a play I had never before encountered in my studies or reading, and I was to assist him on the show. I loved the play when I read it, and we put together a stellar cast of core company members including the beautiful Blythe Danner as Rose Trelawny, the star ingenue of the Sadler's Wells Theatre company. Over the course of the rehearsal period, I fell in love with the script even more, and added it to the growing list of plays that I wanted to direct myself someday.

In my many years here at The Shakespeare Theatre, *Trelawny* has made it onto my "to consider for this season" list numerous times, but each year I have put it off, sensing that it should be saved for a very special occasion. As the 50th season approached, *Trelawny* moved to the top of my list, for the play is a love letter to theatre folk, and no play seemed more apt as a way to pay homage to the thousands of "splendid gypsies" that have trod the boards here for five decades. And so, 30 years later, I am finally fulfilling my dream of mounting my own production, and like Nikos, I have cast a company comprised of many of our core artists – "splendid gypsies" all. In the 30 years between these two experiences, I have not heard of another production of the play being performed in that time. While I'm sure it must have been done somewhere, it is a notoriously under-produced play. I am not sure of the reason for this except that I think it is often misread and misunderstood and therefore dismissed as outdated froth. I think nothing could be further from the truth, and in fact, I think the play is finally coming into its own.

There is a rare, tiny group of plays that have become classics the moment the ink hits the page. However, the vast majority of plays do not stand the test of time and their shelf life is short – sometimes a week, sometimes a year or two, sometimes even a few decades. Ultimately, however, they drift into relative oblivion, or at best, wiggle their way into scholarly footnotes. There is a third group of plays that I call the "new old plays" – and like the first category, it is a small and elite cadre. These are plays that must undergo the test of time and earn their stature as classics. Some were ahead of their time and have been waiting for humanity to catch up with them, others, like *Trelawny*, were underestimated by their contemporary viewers and only by virtue of the passage of time and changing perspectives do they "find" themselves. They somehow emerge, like ancient gems peeking out of the dust, and with some soap, water, and polishing, suddenly gleam and shine with new life and the promise of lasting resonance.

There is no question that *Trelawny* offers up ample froth, but underneath its veneer of brilliant comedy, sentiment, romance and wonderful silliness, there lie eternal truths about artists and admirers and the art of theatre itself. It is replete with glittering illusions and harsh realities; colorful and very real portraits of archetypal characters that are as recognizable now as at any time since the dawn of time; and shrewd, acute observations about the complex and mind-bending ability of art and real life to often become one. The play exhibits the propensity of theatre to be an unending series of thrilling reincarnations by virtue of its traditions and its very essence — the practice of resuscitation. Over and over again, the world's tribe of "splendid gypsies" has breathed life into characters that have become as real to us as the people in our own lives. They pass those roles on to each other not only from generation to generation, but they themselves move through the worlds of the plays like Shakespeare's man of seven ages, handing the younger roles over as they move on to assume the more mature mantles. There is almost a Pirandellian quality that I see in *Trelawny* now, but when it was first penned that quality would not yet have been possible. It is only by virtue of its now venerable age that we can discern its deeper well-springs and complicated reflections on illusion and reality; on lives either dedicated to emotion or to the smothering of it; on the marginalization of artists; on the changing role of women in the working world; on the precarious existence of life in the theatre; and much more.



It is interesting that not many playwrights write about life in the theatre. Sir Arthur Wing Pinero and Russia's great Alexander Ostrovsky are two exceptions. Both men wrote numerous plays about theatre artists, their strife, their glories, and their admirers. Both men were ahead of their time stylistically, and paved the way for new forms and even greater authors. We probably would not know the Chekhov we know without Ostrovsky, and the new forms of comedy, satire and social realism in British drama were, in part, spawned by Pinero. Both men began as actors and neither was very good. Both found their genius in the art of playwrighting. Both functioned as managers, as directors, as producers, and both were champions of actors and writers, effecting great reforms for their fellow artists, including Pinero's achievement of introducing copyright protections for playwrights. In the plays of Ostrovsky and Pinero I have found much delight, comfort and pride — delight in recognition of myself and my own subculture, comfort in knowing that others before me have faced the same trials and dilemmas, and pride in being a part of the eternal continuum that is the rag-tag tribe of theatre gypsies that traipse through the centuries, passing on the world's stories and great characters from one generation to another with full and proud cognizance of all who have come before and of those we will pass the torch on to in the future. This is the thing that is so brilliant about *Trelawny of the Wells* — the heartbreaking and inspiring depiction of that passing of the torch, and it is, and always will be, a hand off that is not managed via computer chips or airwaves or mechanical devices, but via a quiet passage from heart to heart to heart over all the long ages.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Trelawny of the Wells* was first produced in January, 1898, at the Court Theatre in London, and later that same year it premiered in America at the Lyceum Theatre in New York, where it outdid the London production and was a huge hit. It received major British and American revivals in 1925 and 1927, respectively, for which Pinero implemented some significant revisions to the script. The production you are seeing today represents a conflation of both the original and the 1925 version. The most recent major American productions were Joseph Papp's presentations of it in 1970 and again in 1975 at Lincoln Center with Meryl Streep, John Lithgow, Mandy Patinkin and Marybeth Hurt, and in 1982 at the Williamstown Theatre Festival with Blythe Danner, Edward Herrmann, William Swetland and Maria Tucci. It was made into a silent film titled *The Actress* in 1928 starring Norma Shearer and it was also made into a musical in the late 1960's.

In a moment of rare critical generosity to Pinero, George Bernard Shaw wrote:

*"[This play] has touched me more than anything else Mr. Pinero has ever written. ...its charm, as I have already hinted, lies in a certain delicacy which makes me loth to lay my fingers on it...Every stroke touches me: I dwell on the dainty workmanship shown in the third and fourth acts: I rejoice in being old enough to know the world of his dreams."*



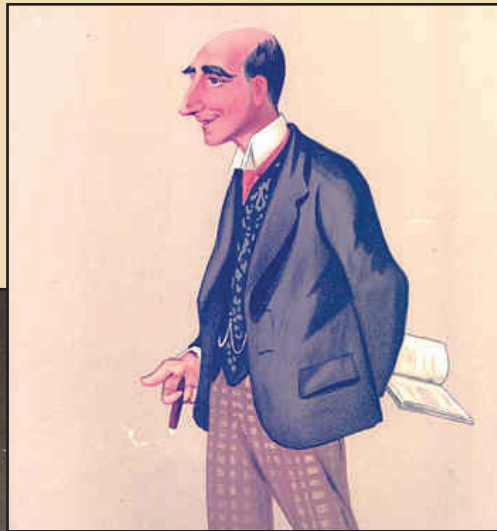
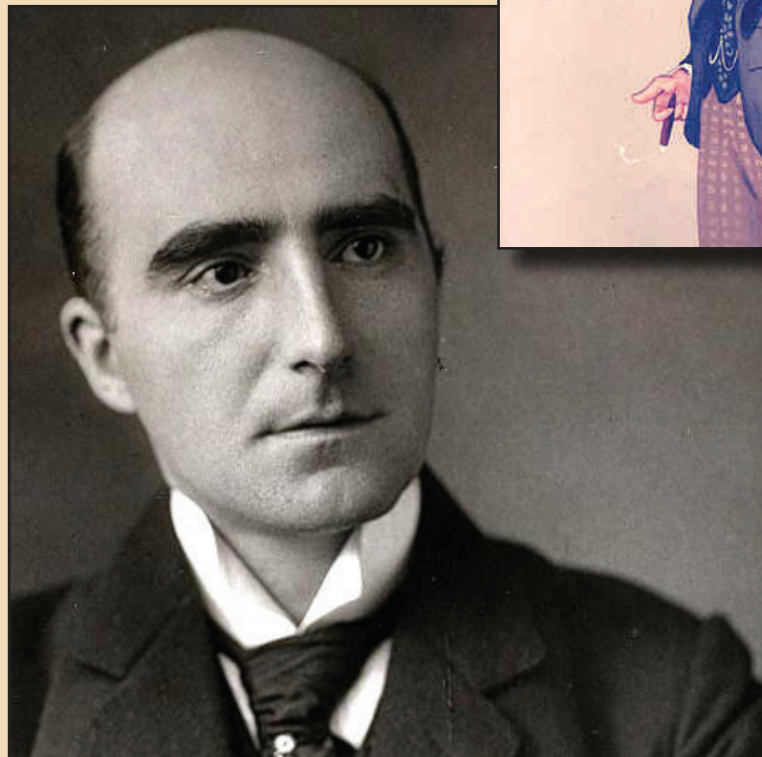
Bonnie J. Monte, Director

Ferdinand Gadd (Jon Barker) and Augustus Colpoys (Connor Carew) fight over Avonia as the others look on in the 2012 Main Stage production of *Trelawny of the Wells*. Photo © Gerry Goodstein.

## About the Playwright: Arthur Wing Pinero

Arthur Wing Pinero was born May 24, 1855, to Lucy Daines and John Daniel Pinero, of Portuguese-Jewish descent. John Daniel had served as a steward at King George IV's coronation and even received a hand-written letter of thanks from the King himself for a service rendered him. His subsequent law career, however, was never more than moderately successful. In 1871, John Daniel's first wife, Nancy, passed away, and her fifty-four-year-old widower was quickly remarried — to sixteen-year-old Lucy Daines. Despite the age difference, their marriage was a happy one, and Lucy bore two daughters, Frances ("Fanny") and Mary, and a son, Arthur. Arthur would begin working for his father at the tender age of ten.

The Pineros moved several times during Arthur's childhood, generally to more respectable neighborhoods. When they moved to Rydon Crescent, Arthur found himself living just across the New River from the Sadler's Wells Theatre. "Pin," as he was known to his friends, took every opportunity he could to go to the theatre, and was so enamoured of it that he would spend his lunch hour every day gazing intently through the windows of the Garrick Club, where the preeminent actors and playwrights of the day would dine.



Although theatre was his true love, Arthur took his work in the law office seriously. "I was always a very old little boy," he would remark later in life. His father was rather careless in business, however, and the family's fortune declined. When John Daniel died in 1871, he left less than £100. Arthur picked up odd jobs to help support his family and took elocution lessons in the evening. He was already writing plays at this time, and once had the idea of typing his manuscripts on company letterhead in order to impress the theatre managers. This impressed neither the managers nor Pinero's employer. It was during this period that Arthur saw Marie Wilton's production of T. W. Robertson's *Caste*, which made a great impression on him and would influence the development his own writing and directing style.

By 1874, the family's finances were secure again, and Arthur had become restless and dissatisfied with his job. He resolved to become an actor. After weeks of fruitless job-searching, Pinero responded to an advertisement and landed a job in Edinburgh as a "general utility" (bit-part) actor.

Pinero's acting career was short and largely unsuccessful, but he learned the ropes of theatre. After Edinburgh, he moved to Liverpool and then London, where he joined the Lyceum Theatre Company and toured the provinces with Sir Henry Irving, the leading actor-manager in London at the time. Although Pinero never moved beyond supporting roles, he made the acquaintance and earned the esteem of influential people from Irving to the Bancrofts.

During this time, Pinero continued writing plays. The first to be staged was a one-act farce called *Two Hundred a Year* (1877). Fifteen more plays in a wide variety of genres

ABOVE: An 1891 caricature of Arthur Pinero, printed in *Vanity Fair*.  
LEFT: A photographic portrait of Arthur Pinero. Popperfoto/Getty Images.

came before Pinero finally gave up acting in 1884. Critic William Archer spotted Pinero's potential as early as 1882, calling him "a playwright of genuine talent whose more mature work will take a prominent and honourable place upon the stage in coming years."

During the run of *Daisy's Escape* (1879), Pinero had fallen in love with one of the actresses, Myra Holme. A widow with a young daughter, Myra was hoping for a better match for herself than a struggling playwright. But he persisted for four years, during which time he made good money on a series of successful plays, and finally she relented and agreed to marry him.

Pinero's biggest early successes (*The Magistrate* (1885), *The Schoolmistress* (1886), and *Dandy Dick* (1887)) were farces — indeed, he created a new kind of English farce that, instead of putting "impossible people in impossible situations," put "real" people into impossible situations. Later, Pinero turned increasingly to "problem plays" that dealt with serious social problems such as the "fallen woman." The most famous of these plays was *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893).

At the turn of the century, Pinero was seen as the leading playwright of his day, even over contemporaries such as Henry Arthur Jones, James Barrie (of *Peter Pan* fame), and George Bernard Shaw. In 1909, Pinero became only the second playwright ever to receive a knighthood for his services to

dramatic literature. However, as Pinero has Mr. Telfer express in *Trelawny of the Wells*, new fashions come along to push the old ones aside. Shaw's vitriolic criticism of Pinero certainly helped bury Pinero in the sands of time. Nevertheless, Pinero was the savior of English drama in the Victorian age and his influence, skill, and worth should not be underestimated. Sir Arthur Pinero died November 23, 1934.

## SELECTED WORKS:

- The Money Spinner (1880)
- In Chancery (1884)
- The Magistrate (1885)
- The Schoolmistress (1886)
- Dandy Dick (1887)
- Sweet Lavender (1888)
- The Profligate (1889)
- The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (1893)
- The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith (1895)
- The Princess and the Butterfly (1897)
- Trelawny of the Wells (1898)
- The Gay Lord Quex (1899)
- Iris (1901)
- His House in Order (1906)
- Mid-Channel (1909)
- The Mind the Paint Girl (1912)

## Pinero's Process

American drama critic Clayton Hamilton wrote, in 1924:

"When [Arthur Pinero] is not writing a play, he is one of the most genial people in England; but, when he is making a new play, he does not see anybody at all. He retires from London and buries himself in the country. He doesn't start with a theme; he doesn't start with an incident or a series of incidents; but he starts with certain characters who happen to interest him. Down at his place in the country, he lives alone with these imagined characters. They become more real to him than the actual friends that he has left behind in London. He watches them; he observes what they think and feel; he listens to them and hears what they say. He told me once that, when they get to talking at dinner-time, he has to go without his dinner. Then, after he has brought these imagined people together and lived with them

for two or three months, he finds that they do certain things to each other, because of the natural and inevitable clash of character on character; and, when incidents result, he observes them and collects them into a series of events. ...

"What interests Pinero primarily is character, and the relation of individual character to social environment. He is interested in creating certain people, and showing how these people are influenced for better or for worse by the social conditions under which they live. ...

"Pinero does not try to formulate and state any general ideas about life; he tries to create life, and to stimulate the spectator to formulate his own ideas about it."

## Commentary and Criticism on *Trelawny of the Wells*

**MORE THAN IT SEEMS:** [*Trelawny*] is neither simple to stage nor slight in content. The theatrical types are exaggerated but never ridiculous...[Tom Wrench is] touching in his devotion to Rose Trelawny, the young actress who outgrows the fustian of *The Pedlar of Marseilles* and is ready for what Robertson's critics called 'cup-and-saucer comedy'...

Moreover it is not just contrast in theatrical convention that distinguishes the play. The rigidity of the Cavendish Square household in which Rose's engagement to Arthur Gower enmeshes her is sketched with insight and wit. Above all, Sir William Gower, its tyrant, grows in understanding and humanity as the play develops...he comes to appreciate Rose's predicament...Their discovery of a mutual bond in Edmund Kean, 'the splendid gipsy', adds a third theatrical perspective, and the conclusion – with Arthur, Rose and Tom about to challenge fortune – is far more stirring than the contrived endings of so many plays of the period. *Trelawny of the Wells* is not only Pinero's happiest inspiration but a key-document in Victorian drama.

George Rowell  
*Plays by A. W. Pinero*

### RARE PRAISE FROM SHAW

Although George Bernard Shaw is much more well known today than is Arthur Pinero, in 1898 Pinero was the leading British playwright while Shaw had yet to see a London production of any of his plays. He was, however, one of the leading critics of his time, and he was so notoriously harsh toward Pinero that the Court Theatre neglected to invite him to opening night of *Trelawny of the Wells*. Shaw joked that that must mean the box office had a poor opinion of the play, but when he finally saw it he noted that the theatre's supposed misgivings "were strangely unwarranted, and...it does not know a good comedieta when it sees one." Shaw's overall opinion of the play was as follows:

"[This play] has touched me more than anything else Mr. Pinero has ever written. ...[I]ts charm, as I have already hinted, lies in a certain delicacy which makes me loth to lay my fingers on it. ...When [Pinero] plays me the tunes of 1860, I appreciate and sympathise. Every stroke touches me: I dwell on the dainty workmanship shown in the third and fourth acts: I rejoice in being old enough to know the world of his dreams."

George Bernard Shaw  
"Mr. Pinero's Past"

**PAST AND PRESENT:** As the action of Pinero's play exemplifies and as the action of Tom's play suggests, change in modes of living, like change in the drama, is change generated by interaction between past and present. ...The future splendor of an actor or an actress is not to be located by imitating the histrionics of Kean, but by re-creating the energy and disruptiveness that enabled his fashion to function as new. The particular novelty is crucial not for its enduring nature but for its timely emergence and for its exemplification of the ongoing need for the timely emergence of further novelty.

Patricia D. Denison  
"Drama in Rehearsal: Arthur W. Pinero's  
*Trelawny of the Wells*"

**CHANGING DRAMA:** Pinero's subject is really the depiction of the change in the Victorian concept of drama itself.

Jane W. Stedman  
"Victorian Author-Actors from Knowles to Pinero"

**RESOLVING RESPECTABILITY:** *Trelawny of the Wells* concerns another working woman's translation into respectability through an impending marriage into the aristocracy. But

whereas in the problem plays of the period, such cross-class liaisons are doomed by the aggressive social conventions they violate, in *Trelawny of the Wells* the issue is evaded and the marriage sanctioned by means of an aesthetic attitude that unites romance with theatre history.

Sheila Stowell  
*A Stage of Their Own*

**HOMAGE:** One of the most delightful works of a great and original humorist—that is *Trelawny of the Wells*. A memorable chapter in our theatrical history delicately and ingeniously dramatised—that is *Trelawny of the Wells*. A graceful homage from the captain of to-day to the pioneer of yesterday, the man who paved the way for all his effort and achievement—that is *Trelawny of the Wells*.

William Archer  
*Study & Stage: A Year-book of Criticism*

## Terms and Phrases Found in *Trelawny of the Wells*

**Boxing Night** – the first day of the pantomime season, the day after Christmas

**bravura** – a difficult piece of sheet music

**canakin** – a small can, especially one used as a drinking vessel (here quoted from *Othello*)

**cold collation** – a light utilitarian meal when there isn't time for a larger affair; a cold buffet

**fallals** – frills, small decorative items of dress and toilette

**fillet** – a headband, worn on the stage by royal personages as an indication of their rank

**gallery-boys** – the young audience members crowded into a theatre's upper gallery, for cheapest prices

**General Utility** – the bottom rung in a stock company of actors; to the General Utility man would fall all the small or undesirable parts

***mala fide*** – legal Latin for 'bad faith'

**old guys** – people of ludicrous appearance, especially overdressed and aging women

**pantomime** – an annual show starting the day after Christmas, relying mostly on bawdy jokes, puns, figure-revealing costumes, and fairy tale or mythic characters

**rodomontade** – bragging, verbal display

**rum start** – low slang, meaning roughly 'a strange event'

**stunner** – 1860s slang for a beautiful woman, but here used in a more general sense of approbation

**swell** – a wealthy gentleman of leisure

**tablets** – notebook

**troubadour** – an itinerant lyric poet of the fifteenth century who would move from court to court singing or reciting his own works

**Vice-Chancellor** – a high legal office in the Court of Chancery, which ceased to exist in 1876

**Walking Gentleman** – the role in a stock company of actors immediately above General Utility

**whist** – a card game; the word also means 'quiet' or 'silent,' and some players therefore insisted that the game be played silently



Rose Trelawny (Nisi Sturgis) and Arthur Gower (Jordan Coughtry) in the 2012 Main Stage production of *Trelawny of the Wells*. Photo © Gerry Goodstein.

## Theatre of the Era

In writing *Trelawny of the Wells*, Pinero drew on both childhood memories of 1860s theatre and on a sense of his intellectual indebtedness to playwright T. W. Robertson. Pinero had been fascinated with the theatre as a child, attending shows at Sadler's Wells Theatre in Islington (thinly disguised as "Bagnigge Wells" in the first edition of *Trelawny*) whenever he had the money, and waiting on street corners to catch glimpses of the actors.

The Wells was in decline at the time: Pinero recalled it as "a smallish house with a few rows of stalls and an eighteenpenny pit in which one sat on a bare plank" where during intermission a venter would pass through shouting, "Ginger-Beer, lemonade, bottled ale or stout, almond cake!" Sets consisted of either green baize for interiors and forests, or bare boards for street scenes — and the occasional mix-up meant that sometimes "half a street went out to meet half a landscape."

Until the mid-1860s, plays were written, staged, and acted in an exaggerated theatrical manner and, according to the Court Theatre's souvenir program for *Trelawny*, "it was almost hopeless to expect managers or actors to regard a play or its parts with any sense of nature or actuality."

T. W. Robertson, with plays like *Caste*, *Play*, and *Ours*, began a movement toward greater realism in theatre. It may appear a little silly to us now to get excited about realistic props and scenery, but it was part of a reaction against the conventionally stilted, affected plays that seemed like mere vehicles for famous actors and had little relationship or relevance to real life as real people lived it. By today's standards and even by Pinero's acknowledgment, Robertson's plays would seem "thin, wishy-washy, superficial," but his "cup and saucer drama" paved the way for the social protest and "problem" playwrights like W. S. Gilbert, Henry Arthur Jones, John Galsworthy, and George Bernard Shaw, and Pinero admired Robertson greatly. A revival of *Caste* at the Court Theatre in 1897 may have suggested the theme for *Trelawny*, which Pinero wrote as a kind of break between more serious plays.

*Trelawny* is a condensed and romanticized portrayal of the shift in theatrical styles brought about by Robertson — Tom Wrench (who shares the initials T. W. with Robertson and whose play, *Life*, mimics the one-word titles of Robertson's plays) is the struggling young playwright who envisions a different kind of drama, one with "locks on the doors, real locks, to work; and handles—to turn!" who gets his opportunity with the help of an entrepreneuring woman, Imogen Parrott (based on the real-life Marie Wilton) and a new theatre, the Pantheon (the real-life Prince of Wales Theatre). Arthur Gower, the young peer who turns his back on his grandfather to join the theatrical profession, somewhat resembles Pinero's own journey to the stage.

### ARTHUR PINERO, "THE THEATRE IN THE 'SEVENTIES" (1929)

"First, as to the state to which our theatre had fallen at the time of the production of [Tom Robertson's play] *Society*. It was a theatre, so far as the higher aims of the drama were concerned, of faded, outworn tradition. Shakespeare was acted pretty regularly in a plodding uninspired way; but for modern poetic drama audiences were still asked to listen to the jog-trot rhetoric of James Sheridan Knowles and to the clap-trap of Edward Bulwer Lytton. For the rest, the staple fare at our playhouses consisted mainly of pirated versions of pieces of foreign origin and the works of Dion Boucicault, Byron, and a few others of small talent. ...Boucicault's vast output was for the most part frankly of the ultra-sensational school, while Byron and his compeers contented themselves with rapidly turning out burlesques and extravaganzas, which were found amusing in proportion to the number of puns they contained, and those domestic dramas which had no more semblance to life than in stature a flea has to an elephant. ...To-day very likely many...would declare that Robertson's best work is thin, wishy-washy, superficial; but in dealing with the stage you must judge an author's work in relation to the age in which he wrote, the obstacles he had to grapple with in the shape of ancient prejudices and seemingly impassable barriers, and so judged, it can scarcely be denied that Robertson was a man of vision and courage."

## Production History

**1898** - *Trelawny of the Wells* premieres at the Court Theatre in London, under Arthur Pinero's direction. The show is a moderate success, attracting large audiences and mixed reviews. Many viewers are preoccupied with what they perceive to be the "grotesque" fashions of the 1860s.

**1898** - The American premiere of *Trelawny* at the Lyceum Theatre in New York outdoes its London run and is a tremendous hit. It tours after its initial run.

**1900** - Daly's Theatre in New York briefly revives *Trelawny* as a farewell to Mary Mannering, who played Rose Trelawny in 1898.

**1910** - Charles Frohman includes *Trelawny* in his attempt to launch a national repertory theatre in England. Pinero warns that the crowd will choose one play as its favorite and ignore the other. Pinero is right, and the crowd chooses *Trelawny*.

**1911** - Ethel Barrymore stars as Rose Trelawny at the Empire in New York. Reviewers still recall the 1898 premiere, however, and prefer the earlier version.

**1916** - Cecil Hepworth directs the first film adaptation of *Trelawny*.

**1917** - Irene Vanbrugh reprises Rose at the New Theatre in London (she had originated the role). The production continues through WWI air raids: one night, a bomb falls right after Arthur Gower's line, "Quiet, isn't it?"

**1925** - John Drew (great-great-uncle of Drew Barrymore) receives critical acclaim as Sir William at the Knickerbocker Theatre in New York.

**1925** - Pinero again directs *Trelawny*, this time as a contribution toward refurbishing the old Sadler's Wells, to be

run by the owners of the Old Vic. Pinero makes substantial cuts and changes to the fourth act.

**1927** - Producer George C. Tyler assembles an all-star cast (including John Drew) to tour the country with *Trelawny*. It is a huge financial success.

**1928** - Norma Shearer stars in a film adaptation, *The Actress*.

**1967** - Maggie Smith steals the show as Avonia Bunn in a London revival.

**1972** - Julian Slade's musical adaptation plays in the West End.

**1975** - Joseph Papp chooses *Trelawny* to open the season at Lincoln Center. The production features such future stars as Meryl Streep and John Lithgow, but fails to recapture the charm of a smaller 1970 Papp production.

**1982** - Nikos Psacharopoulos directs *Trelawny* at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, starring Blythe Danner as Rose.

**1992** - Sarah Brightman and Helena Bonham Carter star in a West End revival of *Trelawny*.



Production stills from the 1898 New York premiere.

TOP: Mrs. Mossop trims Tom Wrench's coatsleeves;



BOTTOM: Avonia's pantomime costume scandalizes Sir William.

## Further Reading

Arundell, Dennis. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1964*. London: H. Hamilton, 1965.

*Classic Theatre: The Humanities in Drama*. Eds. Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, William Burto. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975.

Denison, Patricia D. "Drama in Rehearsal: Arthur W. Pinero's *Trelawny of the 'Wells'*." *Modern Drama* 31.2 (1988): 141-156..

Fyfe, Hamilton. *Sir Arthur Pinero's Plays and Players*. London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1930.

Lazenby, Walter. *Arthur Wing Pinero*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972.

Wood, Peggy. *A Splendid Gypsy: John Drew*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1928.

## Who Said That?

Match the spoken line to the character who speaks it.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| A. "You 'ave plucked the flower, sir; you 'ave stole our ch'icest blossom."   | ROSE TRELAWNY, a star ingenue actress                     |
| B. "Windows on the one side, doors on the other—just where they should be, architecturally. And locks on the doors, real locks, to work; and handles—to turn!"  | TOM WRENCH, a bit-actor and playwright                    |
| C. "A young man then, I was; quite different from the man I am now—impulsive, excitable. Kean! Ah, he was a splendid gypsy!"  | AVONIA BUNN, an actress in the pantomime                  |
| D. "I don't think the "rules" of this house are fair to Rose! oh, I must say it—they are horribly unfair!"  | IMOGEN PARROTT, a leading actress turned producer         |
| E. "I'm always stark mad as the pantomime approaches. I don't grudge letting the rest of the company have their fling at other times—but with the panto comes my turn."   | FERDINAND GADD, a leading actor in the company            |
| F. "I—! 'pon my soul! Popular favorite! Draw more money than all the—old guys—"   | AUGUSTUS COLPOYS, a comic actor                           |
| G. "Well, that's as cheerful as I can make things look, poor dear!"   | MR. JAMES TELFER, an elder member of the company          |
| H. "I leave. The Romeo, the Orlando, the Clifford—leaves!"  | MRS. TELFER, his wife                                     |
| I. "I remember. I placed myself in an upwight position, dearwest, to prewent myself dozing."  | O'DWYER, a stage manager                                  |
| J. "...if we are set to scrub a floor—and we may come to that yet—let us make up our minds to scrub it legitimately—with dignity—"  | MRS. MOSSOP, the landlady                                 |
| K. "Now, the question is, will five hundred produce the play?"  | MR. ABLETT, the grocer                                    |
| L. "Clear the stage there! I'll not have it! Upon my honor, this is the noisiest theatre I've ever set foot in!"  | SARAH, a maid   |
| M. "Come, come, come, this is quite out of place! Young ladies do not crouch and huddle upon the ground—do they, William?"  | ARTHUR GOWER, a young member of the gentry                |
| N. "We are only dolls, partly human, with mechanical limbs that will fall into stagey postures, and heads stuffed with sayings out of rubbishy plays. It isn't the world we live in, merely a world—such a queer little one!" | SIR WILLIAM GOWER, Vice-Chancellor; grandfather to Arthur |
| O. "And so this new-fangled stuff, and these dandified people, are to push us, and such as us, from our stools!"  | MISS TRAFALGAR GOWER, his sister; great aunt to Arthur    |
|   | CLARA DE FOENIX, Arthur's sister                          |
|   | CAPTAIN DE FOENIX, her husband                            |
|   | CHARLES, butler to the Gowers                             |



## Test Your Understanding

- Who wrote the play *Trelawny of the Wells*?
  - William Shakespeare
  - George Bernard Shaw
  - Arthur Wing Pinero
  - Henry Arthur Jones
- In what time period does *Trelawny of the Wells* take place?
  - 1710s
  - 1860s
  - 1890s
  - 1950s
- Why is Rose leaving the theatre at the beginning of the play?
  - She no longer enjoys acting.
  - She has gotten a job at a more prestigious theatre.
  - She has gotten engaged.
  - She is not making enough money to support herself.
- Why must Rose live with the Gowers for a trial period?
  - The Gowers do not consider actors to be respectable members of society, and they wish to acclimate her to society.
  - Arthur can't decide whether he truly loves Rose, and wants to get his grandfather's opinion of Rose.
  - Rose and Arthur do not have their own place to live yet.
  - Rose needs more time to weigh her career options.
- What does Tom Wrench get excited about at the Gowers' house?
  - Spending time with his friends
  - The furniture and decorations
  - The weather
  - Rose's dress
- What leads Ferdinand Gadd to nearly quit the theatre?
  - He sees how well Rose's life has gone after leaving the Wells.
  - He has a big argument with Augustus Colpoys, who he believes is having an affair with his wife.
  - The theatre's management changes hands, and he dislikes the new owners.
  - He has been offered a role in the pantomime, which he believes is below his artistry.
- Why does Rose's salary get reduced?
  - She is playing different roles than she was before.
  - She is working part-time.
  - She is no longer popular.
  - She can no longer act melodramatically.
- Who keeps in touch with Arthur and arranges for him to meet Rose again?
  - Imogen Parrott
  - Mrs. Telfer
  - Tom Wrench
  - Sir William
- How does Sir William help Rose?
  - He gives her his unequivocal blessing to marry Arthur.
  - He helps finance a play in which she will star.
  - He purchases some stage props her mother had given her.
  - He lends her money.
- What secret career does Arthur Gower take up after leaving his grandfather's home?
  - A spy for the government
  - A shipsman handling cargo to America
  - An actor
  - A playwright

# About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving approximately 100,000 adults and young people annually, it is New Jersey's largest professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare's canon and other classic masterworks. With its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the East Coast and the seventh largest in the nation, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 50th season in 2012.



The company's 2012 Main Stage season features six productions presented in its 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre and runs June through December. In the summer, an Outdoor Stage production is also presented at the Greek Theatre, an open-air amphitheatre nestled in a hillside on the campus of the College of Saint Elizabeth in nearby Morristown.

In addition to being a celebrated producer of classic plays and operating *Shakespeare LIVE!* (one of the largest educational Shakespeare touring programs in the New York/New Jersey region), The Shakespeare Theatre is also deeply committed to nurturing new talent for the American stage. By providing an outstanding training ground for students of the theatre, and cultivating audiences for the future by providing extensive outreach opportunities for students across New Jersey and beyond, The Shakespeare Theatre is a leader in arts education. For additional information, visit our web site at [www.ShakespeareNJ.org](http://www.ShakespeareNJ.org).

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company's dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting "new" theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director, Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's programs are made possible, in part, by funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional major support is received from The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the F.M. Kirby Foundation, The Edward T. Cone Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, and Drew University, as well as contributions from numerous corporations, foundations, government agencies and individuals.  
The Shakespeare Theatre is an independent, professional theatre company located on the Drew University campus.



NEW JERSEY  
STATE  
COUNCIL  
ON THE  
ARTS



NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE ARTS



Theatre  
Communications  
Group



New Jersey  
Media Sponsor



THE WESTIN  
GOVERNOR MORRIS  
MORRISTOWN



AA American  
Airlines  
Official Airline of  
The Shakespeare Theatre  
of New Jersey