

# British Theatre Guide

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## The Marrying of Ann Leete

Harley Granville Barker  
Orange Tree, Richmond  
(2004)

It is a great shame that Harley Granville Barker, one of theatre's most important personalities a hundred years ago is becoming a forgotten man. Sam Walters, that snapper up of unconsidered trifles and resurrector of reputations, has picked Barker's first play for the start of The Orange Tree's autumn season.

To be honest, if *The Marrying of Ann Leete* were a new play, the critics would probably say that the 22-year-old playwright showed great promise but hadn't really got his act together yet. It says something that it has only ever been revived once, by the RSC at The Aldwych in 1975.

The majority of the play, set in 1799, mixes personal and national politics in a style reminiscent of Trollope. It focuses on the Leetes, well-to-do country folk with too many skeletons in cupboards to please polite society. It commences in darkness on a patio that we eventually see has climbing rose trellises and an octagonal pond.

Father, the wonderfully named Sir Carnaby (played by Richard Howard) is vacillating between political parties, "An anchor in each camp", aggravating everyone. Son George (David Antrobus) has married beneath him. There is a memorable cameo effort from Sam Dowson as his wife, the dreadful Dolly. Elder daughter (Miranda Foster as Lady Cottesham) is involved in a scandalous affair that is made worse by the fact that her father-in-law, the Duke is influential in (or possibly heads) Sir Carnaby's party.

All hope of redemption rests with Ann, played by Octavia Walters. The youngest daughter is a teenager and could be as young as fifteen. She has too much imagination and hasn't understood that she is "The instrument of political destiny". Thus there is a desperate need for her to make a political marriage, whatever the personal consequences.

Her final choice defines the last two acts, one set in an ante-room at her wedding reception. This is filled with a farcical collection of dreadful guests, including a grandmother who looks as if she has been brought to the celebrations directly from her grave.

From there it is to the marital home and some not very deep conversation between the married couple. To describe it though, would give the game away.

Elements of *The Marrying of Ann Leete* show that Harley Granville Barker was on his way to becoming a great playwright with a strong political bent. On that level and for some good dramatic (more often melodramatic) moments, this is a curiosity worth seeing.

Reviewer: [Philip Fisher](#)