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Margaret Macnamara: a 'New Woman' of the Independent Theatre Movement

In this article Patricia Lufkin examines the work of Margaret Macnamara, a remarkable feminist playwright whose work has fallen into obscurity but who deserves attention as an important female participant in the Independent Theatre Movement and the Fabian Society. Macnamara's associations and collaborations with key figures of the time, including George Bernard Shaw, are explored, and her progressive thought and participation in key organizations demonstrated. Importantly, Lufkin analyzes Macnamara's play *The Gates of the Morning* (1908), highlighting its feminist critique of religion and its patriarchal influence. The critical response to her work was mixed, yet both positive and hostile reviews acknowledged that the play was a competent and stirring example of the new drama of progressive ideas, and helped to bring the 'woman question' to the forefront of people's minds. Patricia Lufkin received her PhD from Louisiana State University, and is now teaching at Arkansas State University Mid-South. Her research focuses on early twentieth-century British theatre, most significantly on the life and work of Macnamara and Samuel Beckett.

Key terms: The Gates of the Morning, Fabian Society, Stage Society, feminism, George Bernard Shaw, Women's Institute.

MARGARET MACNAMARA (1883–1950) was a prolific British female dramatist, whose eighteen published plays and fourteen manuscripts reflect the concerns of a woman coming of age during the tumultuous and exciting period of the early twentieth century. Her association with George Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker, Elizabeth Robins, Annie Horniman, and Nugent Monck attest to her centrality as a playwright of the Independent Theatre Movement. With the growing question of the 'New Woman' and the overt activities of the suffragettes, she was positioned on the cusp of a new era.

Having had a traditional Victorian-era upbringing, Macnamara's challenge was to embrace the revolutionary ideology of the present along with the opportunities it presented for her and other women. In doing this, she became a founding member of the Women's Institute of Henfield in West Sussex, which espoused the same political values as the Fabian Society and the Stage Society. As I hope to show, she embraced the vibrant activism of these organizations, and the values of feminism, socialism, and pacifism infused her writing as a dramatist. However, her work has largely gone unnoticed by theatre historians. This article is thus a call to reintegrate her work into present-day academic discourse.

The Incorporated Stage Society was founded in 1899 as part of the wider Independent Theatre Movement that was sweeping Europe at the time. Its aim was to provide support and a platform for plays that focused on contemporary social and political questions and, as such, was a successor to J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre Society (1891–97). George Bernard Shaw was a leading member of the Society and aimed for it to become a laboratory for experimental theatre in England.

Included in this was the encouragement of female writers including Macnamara, although, even as the suffrage movement was well underway, they remained secondary to their male counterparts. And still today the women's work of the time remains relatively unknown, demonstrating the prevalence of patriarchy within the British theatre and wider British society.

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The Stage Society had close links with the recently formed Fabian Society, sharing both members and political values.[1] Believing in the importance of gradualism and permeation to bring about longstanding social change – epitomized in the motto 'evolution not revolution' – the Fabians' socialist beliefs played an increasingly influential role in British politics, especially in the founding of the Labour Representation Committee, officially renamed the Labour Party in 1906. By 1918, the Party's constitution stated that Fabianism was accepted as its doctrinal basis.

While working towards the formation of a classless society, the Fabians could not ignore women's protests over their lack of rights to vote, to receive a quality education, to obtain financial independence and freedom from any other form of subjugation. Informed by Marxism and Social Darwinism, the Fabians regarded capitalism as incompatible with women's fight for liberation, since with the idea of the productive household came the need for woman's place to be in the home. Furthermore, they believed that 'women's freedom would result from their . . . liberation within a transformed economic and social system'.[2] The 'woman question' was thus integral to the promotion of socialism as equality to all humankind.

The Stage Society and the New Drama that it promoted similarly embraced new notions of womanhood and staged work that called for female suffrage. As Vivien Gardner elucidates:

> The New Drama should be regarded less as simply an avant-garde theatre for middle-class intellectuals than as one of the fields in which emergent social ideas were being explored in representation.[3]

Gates of the Morning at the Stage Society

The main problem, however, was that this representation of women was dominated initially by male writers such as Ibsen and Shaw. Therein lies the significance of such Fabian writers as Margaret Macnamara, who, I argue, paved the way for women to represent themselves on the stage.

While Beatrice Webb was assembling detailed documentation of London's slums to display her antipathy for the excesses of capitalism, Macnamara incorporated her feminist, pacifist, and socialist beliefs into her stage plays. She followed Shaw's lead into the realm of drama as an expression of ideology, and Shaw supported and encouraged Macnamara's efforts as a playwright and helped to bring her works to the stage.

Thus, he sponsored the Stage Society's production of her play *The Gates of the Morning*, which played at the Lyric Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue during its 1908 season.[4] This production proved to be a significant case of an accomplished female writer showcasing feminist ideas and gaining wider publicity and notoriety for doing so.

The Gates of the Morning concerns the marriage of Alice Larne and Samuel Wilson, a revivalist preacher. Having run away from a loveless upper-class home to start a life in the theatre, Alice is left alone with a baby after her lover is killed in an accident before they can marry. As a struggling single mother, Alice attends a revival meeting, where she meets Wilson and they marry soon after.

The play opens in the young couple's home, where the dying Mill Robyn, Alice's friend from the theatre, is staying during a period of convalescence. The first half of the play depicts Wilson's increasingly vigorous attempts to convert the dying woman to secure her salvation, encouraging her to admit her past sins and atone for them. In Act Two, Wilson reveals his devious plans to separate Alice from her child, first by encouraging her mother to take it and then to accept her aunt's offer of looking after the baby. At this point, Alice confronts her overbearing husband and tells him plainly of his own need for contrition. Showing his love for Alice, he relents humbly and embraces the mother and child as the play ends.

In its foregrounding of the relationship between Alice and the tyrannical Reverend Samuel Wilson, the play explores issues of patriarchal control and female resistance. When Alice finally stands up for her rights as a human being capable of making her own decisions, it becomes a turning point in the

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play both for her and her husband. She is then able to find her own voice and define her own reality.

In depicting Wilson as a clergyman, Macnamara's play is also a biting satire about the consequences of religious fanaticism. The topic of parenthood becomes an issue both in the portrayal of Alice's mother and the controversy over Alice bearing a child out of wedlock, while the subplot of Mill Robyn's temporary conversion accentuates the theme of religious patriarchy. Robyn not only provides the play's comic relief, but also becomes another victim to the forcefulness of Wilson. The two main female characters thus embody the play's declaration of the need for women to resist patriarchy.

Wilson and 'Heavenly Redemption'

In the character of Reverend Samuel Wilson, Macnamara warns of the danger of religious fanaticism. Wilson places religion above all other things in his life and displays a drive and determination that ultimately destroys the characters he is trying to 'save'. Having found gratification from exerting mastery over others, he neglects his followers' needs and shows a lack of compassion as he focuses solely upon being the facilitator of their 'heavenly redemption'. His wife Alice, a single mother, is so happy to have found a husband and father for her child that she fails to realize his extremism.

His fixation on Mill Robyn's salvation highlights his determination to convert others to his way of thinking and living. The older woman follows the preacher's directives and claims to disown her previous life of deceit and promiscuity. She agrees to atone for her sins in order to escape hell and damnation, displaying her new conversion dramatically by praying and crying aloud on her bed, although her tendency to move back and forth into the religious mode lends humour to the play.

As the preacher tries to save each person he comes into contact with, his own weaknesses are revealed. Once Alice realizes what is happening, she confronts her husband, leaving Wilson to conclude that he needs to atone for his sins no less than the people he has been trying to convert.

Given that Macnamara's play questioned religion directly at a time when such a theme was considered scandalous, sections of the press unsurprisingly took issue and created public contention. Under the title 'Blasphemy on the Stage', the critic from the *Daily Mirror* described the play as making 'irreverent allusions to ideas which are sacred to millions of English people'.[5] The critic from *The Sunday Sun* similarly warned: 'I have no doubt that Miss Mack's Dissenting draper turned minister will be regarded as libel by most of the Nonconformists who see it, and many people who are not very devout would be scandalized possibly by his free use of phrases, sacred from association and blessed words.'[6] The critic was no doubt thinking of Wilson's orders to the dying Mill Robyn:

> Calm yourself! Quiet! There'll be worse than death in your face if you backslide into sin and take your vanity with you into the grave. Torture by fire there'll be in your face. Flames rouging from your sunken cheeks – flames blackening your dried-up lips – flames.[7]

As is clear from this, Wilson's brand of religion is one of hellfire and damnation for the unrepentant sinner. It is a vision that inspires fear rather than serious contemplation of life's meaning or deliberation over actions in the present, while its purely surface quality turns religion into a showcase instead of provoking a reflective relationship to the self and the possibilities of the divine among devotees.

This deeply critical depiction of religion garnered support from such similarly controversial figures as Shaw, who advised Macnamara to steel herself against the reactions of others and remain resolved in her original intention for the drama: 'Preserve every element of strangeness with jealousy: it is just the parts that they will feel comfortable and familiar with that are of least importance. Shock, mystify, outrage and wound for all you are worth.'[8]

Amidst the controversy, several reviewers recognized the value of what Macnamara brought to the stage. E. F. Spence of the

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Westminster Gazette summarized Wilson's character as follows:

> The chief feature of *The Gates of the Morning* is the vivid picture given by Samuel Wilson, a Nonconformist minister, drawn very cruelly, yet with an admirable impartiality and treated as an individual, not a type. He is a narrow-minded enthusiast, intensely sincere but amazingly fatuous in his belief in himself as a prophet and a preacher: a small, mean-looking, uncouth common man, a draper by trade, with a natural flow of words that sometimes reaches eloquence and at the back of which is a passionate belief by means of which he is able to sway crowds.[9]

Multidimensional Characterization

Others echoed this account, demonstrating that, although the reviewers found the work offensive, they seemed compelled to acknowledge Macnamara's ability to convey complex characters. Indeed, the press credited her with skill and finesse as a dramatist regardless of gender. *The Sketch* reviewer thus commented that her multidimensional characterization of the preacher was testimony to her talent as a playwright, exclaiming:

> Margaret M. Mack in *The Gates of the Morning* has given one of the most vivid pictures of the over self-righteous that I can remember. We have had many unpleasing Nonconformist ministers on the stage, but none so painful as Samuel, and none that I can remember so ably drawn. The skill in the character-drawing of the vain-glorious, Bible spouting converter of souls, beneath whose vast vanity and narrow mind lies a real man, capable of generous impulse and even humility, a creature who at the worst, is intensely sincere enough to show that Miss (or Mrs) Mack is a born dramatist.[10]

Rather than present the preacher as broadly farcical, Macnamara created a character genuinely committed to what he was doing, and who believes strongly in his calling.

> Alice's conversion was a gentle shower with the sun shining through: and against the darkest cloud was the rainbow of me falling in love. Soft and bright and sudden. But mark this, my dear wife, my first quiver of yearning was towards your immortal soul.[11]

It is this intensity that stops Wilson from being a stereotype, since he is not merely a charlatan but truly believes in himself as a representative of God.

The *Daily News* reviewer concluded that it is Wilson's 'will and narrow ideas that create the dramatic clash'.[12] His strength of conviction propels the play forward, as he attempts to drive everyone in his path towards salvation. It is this word 'drive' that testifies to his character: instead of leading gently or by example, Wilson resorts to coercive techniques that become abrasive and frightening, and his ferocity of will has a way of intimidating others. As the critic from *The Times Literary Supplement* noted:

> He knows his Bible by heart, regards texts as talismans, has a real gift for florid speech, sincerely believes himself to be without sin, more particularly without self-deception and self-righteousness.[13]

Norman Page, the director of the Stage Society production, was forced to play Wilson when another actor relinquished the role at short notice. Page was a burgeoning actor in London's theatre scene, predominantly known for playing comic parts. Several reviewers commented that his performance in the play should serve as a significant step in his already advancing reputation.

Having been directed by Granville Barker on several occasions, Page had learnt the importance of subtlety in speech and movement when portraying a character. This clearly paid dividends, with the *Birmingham Daily Post* commending Page's refinement of style: 'Curiously though perhaps unconsciously, reminiscent of the methods of Mr Granville Barker, he imparted a reality of feeling to the morbid and self-righteous fanatic.'[14]

To create the preacher's presumptuous manner, critics observed how Page combined restraint with forcefulness. The following description of his performance in the *Era* warrants quoting for its imagistic conception of his portrayal of the character:

> Lean, pale, and magnetic, with a dome-like forehead and deeply sunken eyes, Mr Page gave a very convincing picture of the personage, and by the intensity of his acting and the admirable unconsciousness with which he delivered the most comical lines, made a valuable and highly artistic contribution to the performance.[15]

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Page showed great skill in the manner in which he humanized the preacher's overbearing qualities by displaying an earnest passion for winning souls and convincing himself constantly of his heavenly mission. As the critic from the *Sunday Sun* confirmed: 'Even when he deceives himself, it is with the aid of some doctrine or principle that in its purity may be great and beneficient.'[16]

This critic noted that 'the Nonconformists would likely regard the playwright's rendition of the minister to be a slanderous representation of their denomination'.[17] Yet, Macnamara provides the means for audience members to empathize with the character since he is just as deceived by the image that he puts forth as are his needy followers. Self-taught and equally self-determined, Wilson lacks the capacity to perceive how he transgresses the boundaries of others and dismisses any indication of his lack of empathy.

His intense manner of showing affection to his young wife shows the same forwardness he uses to sway crowds. However, Macnamara's presentation of the preacher shows him to be ultimately vulnerable to this intensity before revealing his willingness to change. As the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer concluded: 'Under the hot gospeller, there is the makings of a man.'[18] Thus, while experiencing conflicting responses from the press and a backlash from more conservative writers, Macnamara's play modelled Fabian outlooks and provoked public debate.

Resisting Patriarchal Authority

It is Alice who initiates Samuel Wilson's transformation, experiencing in turn her own transformation into an independent, confident woman. As the play progresses, audience members are left to wonder whether Alice will give up her child and accompany her husband to New Zealand to further his ministry. When Wilson refuses flatly to assume custody of the child towards the play's climax, Alice awakens from her delusions about her husband and realizes the full implication of his pride and egotism. Macnamara shows that a mother's love for her child is stronger than her love for her husband, and the drama takes a conclusive turn as Alice confronts Wilson for using his religious authority to manipulate others.

In confronting her husband, Alice asserts her right to tolerate his excesses no longer, and the couple enter into a clash of wills, which brings to the surface the underlying aspirations of them both. When Alice discovers that Wilson believes children to be nothing more than a burden that would distract him from his beatific ministry, she turns on him with unleashed fury, pointing out his lack of sensitivity to others as she announces her intention to keep her baby.

Wilson is shaken by her vehement attack upon his character and breaks down in tears. The danger of losing Alice prompts him to apply the same scrutiny to himself that he has applied to others, and with a display of humility, he becomes a more likeable character. Demonstrating his strength through his willingness to face his own pride, Macnamara captures visually his desire to save their marriage through his embrace of both mother and child. This moment is particularly significant since it shows Alice finding her voice in the face of his tyranny.

Macnamara's treatment of women's enforced silence here anticipates the theme of such later twentieth-century feminist playwrights as Timberlake Wertenbacker, who links facility with language to the ability to develop conceptual thinking.[19] Macnamara shows that, without a viable form of expression, women like Alice are less inclined to question conditions around them or to critique the behaviour of others, instead having to uphold an enforced silence. When Alice speaks up for herself and tells Wilson what she thinks about 'his' religion and her former position as the silent supporter, Macnamara calls for all women to find their voices in political and theoretical discourse.

She also uses the play to argue that both mother and father should share the responsibility of parenthood. Although Alice's child is illegitimate and from a previous liaison, the child is part of Alice and Alice is part of the child – for whom Wilson feels no kinship: 'I'm praying for guidance, to make a suitable arrangement for the upbringing of this infant

who came into the world against His law.'[20] In his deep belief in himself as a prophet, he predicts that if Alice does not relinquish the baby, it will be an ominous sign to the Lord, warning: 'You forget the foreboding has a black shadow across your first-born.'[21] Yet, despite his arguments and attempts to instil fear in her regarding the baby, Alice refuses to part with her child and insists that it will be part of their lives or they will have no life together.

Alice Reclaims Her Soul

Other relationships similarly serve as a vehicle for Macnamara's damning critique of society and its hierarchical structure, especially the relationship between Alice and her mother. Alice has run away from her privileged family due to its coldness and lack of concern, leading the *Birmingham Gazette* to label Mrs Larne 'a mean old mother'.[22] Surrounded by wealth, this upper-class woman lost the capacity for compassion and empathy towards others, including her own daughter, and, following Alice's departure, she has turned to her pug dogs. When discussing Alice, Mrs Larne fixates on the numerous times since childhood that her daughter has defied her, showing that Alice had found her voice against her mother's distancing qualities long ago.

To make the condemnation of this style of parenting clear, Macnamara shows Alice ultimately putting her child first. In her performance as Alice in the 1908 production, Amy Lamborn highlighted the importance of her role as a mother. As the critic for the *Era* observed: 'Miss Amy Lamborn played Alice with a bold, simple, straightforward style that was very effective, her bursts of maternal feeling, and her scornful tirade in the last act being treated with spirit, earnestness, and ability.'[23]

The precarious desperation of Alice's position as a single mother dampens her rebellious spirit and draws her to the strong personality of Samuel Wilson, initially blurring the conflicts in their relationship. Yet, in rediscovering Alice's voice, Macnamara turns her from a desperate runaway into a strong and independent woman. She realizes that she has made the mistake of being misled by her desire rather than facing the reality of the situation with her new husband who wants her to keep silent upon important matters and to obey him without question. As her husband prepares to leave for his heroic mission in New Zealand, she declares:

> I was going to spend the night with baby at a hotel. I'd better stick to that. Meet us at the dock in the morning. You can take us both or leave us both. Whichever you choose.[24]

Even when he reminds her that her luggage is locked up at the dock, she will not be swayed: 'It can be sent back. Or I'll forfeit it. I shall manage somehow.'[25]

With a new determination to stand on her own, she remains unwilling to be subject to her husband's jealous rejection of the child or to go back to her mother, declaring instead her own independence. She goes as far as denouncing her husband's love:

> I'm sick of the word. Your love is like a great snake, coiling and crushing – a great snake of jealousy. Again and again, I've spotted your jealousy and shut my eyes. I so wanted to believe you are good.[26]

She then proceeds to state her wants and needs to him confidently, as a free woman:

> It's quite simple: we are not suited. What I want most of all is brothers and sisters for baby – yes, four or five of them. That's natural and right. What you want is a barren wife – wrapped up in your grovelling – not daring to look at another man or call her soul her own.[27]

Since Wilson has continually judged her spiritual state, when he exhorts her to 'recall the gates of the morning', she replies:

> Twaddle! There aren't any gates to the morning. You invent them – and they're locked – and you're the only one man with the key.[28]

Showing her unwillingness to let him control her with his authoritarian religion, Alice stands up to him with a certainty and leaves him shocked and shaken when she orders him: 'Stop talking! I shan't bother about being

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religious any more – Men make religion up, and expect women to put up with it. I've had enough.'[29] Resolute in her move toward independence, Alice claims her very soul back from her husband.

Alice's character is similar to other female protagonists brought on stage by female writers of the time. Elizabeth Robins's 1907 play *Votes for Women!* focuses primarily upon suffrage, but also draws attention to the need for the self-determination that Alice finds as a way of achieving future equality with men. Similarly, Githa Sowerby's 1911 play *Rutherford and Son* 'attacks patriarchal tyranny and suggests a better, female-determined future', while Cicely Hamilton's *Just to Get Married* (also 1911) is concerned with women's 'enforced economic dependency on men', and shows their need for financial independence to ensure equality.[30]

Alice's character thus represents many needs of young women of the time as related to feminism: independence of spirit and self-determination; a refusal to rely upon a man for economic security; the refusal to yield to patriarchal tyranny in religion or mind; and the right to lead an independent life and become empowered as an individual.

While the plot focuses on the preacher's epiphany of self, Alice's moment of self-realization is just as crucial to the narrative. Macnamara anticipates Helene Keyssar's theory of feminist theatre in her depiction of the striking transformational experience that frees Alice from linear and caustic environments, even if only from within. Keyssar argues that feminist dramatists often depict women who experience a desire to effect change in experiencing individual growth: 'Drama that embraces transformation inspires and asserts the possibility for change of roles and role-playing.'[31]

In the depiction of Alice, Macnamara shows a character's transformational experience to be one small aspect of a continuing quest to form a more viable identity, since one experience could not represent an entire lifetime. Nonetheless, she presents Alice's transformational moment as an important break with self-defeating or stagnant habits of living.

As Alice begins to realize the full ramifications of her circumstances, her novel efforts for self-expression create a sense of resistance against the power of traditional thought. While Wilson has been busy converting others, Alice has brought him to greater awareness of his self. A reviewer from the *Times Literary Supplement* writes of the force of the last scene:

> Her wrath and plain-speaking quite crumple up Samuel whose faith in himself is so shaken that he clings dazed and helpless to mother and child.[32]

Throughout the play, Wilson rebukes Alice for her lack of attention to his directions, yet he is humbled when his wife's strength of will equals his own. Alice, in turn, has found a way to stand up to the brutality of her husband's religion and patriarchy.

The Critics' Conclusions

The reviewer from the *Times Literary Supplement* recalled of the production:

> One came away from it a little shocked, a little tired, a little angry with the author, and yet forgiving her for the sake of several really good moments. . . . How seldom one gets moments in the theatre that can be called really good![33]

These comments suggest the kind of responses that the Stage Society hoped to evoke from audience members. It is useful to recall Shaw's advise to Macnamara that causing discomfort and dismay was a good thing, while it is telling that Macnamara saved a clipping of the *Sunday Sun*'s scathing review, suggesting that she enjoyed the impact her play had.[34]

Framing his review with an acknowledgment that it is 'one of the functions of the Stage Society to do queer things', the *TLS* critic describes Macnamara's play as 'naively, flauntingly, and outrageously queer', which sometimes verges on 'downright bad taste'; but there was also 'much clevernesss in the play, cleverness of observation and irony'.[35] After going into vivid and descriptive detail, he concludes:

This gallimaufry of Revivalism, High churchism, pug-dogs, and babies is sufficiently absurd. But we begin by remarking that the play was queer.[36]

The last lines echo the Victorian ideal of womanhood propounded by Coventry Patmore in his narrative poem 'Angel in the House'. Patmore proposes that women should not be too clever as it will make them restless and discontented with their role as the supporter of the male figure. The reviewer seemingly shares this view of womanhood, concluding paternalistically: 'One half suspects the author of being a clever, morbid schoolgirl, and feels inclined to prescribe hockey and plenty of rice-pudding.'[37]

At issue, of course, is Macnamara's drastic departure from the Victorian ideal of womanliness and femininity. She defies the claim that a woman's role is to provide solace to the man and to create a place of sanctuary in the home. Furthermore, she argues against the idea that women should not be educated or more intelligent than a man, who is able to manoeuvre in the outside world while she remains confined to the boundaries of the home. She also challenges the belief that if a girl learns too much it will disrupt the 'normal' pattern of life. By having Alice run away from a life of security on two separate occasions, Macnamara shows that this disruption is sometimes both necessary and positive.

While remarking on the play's feminist theme, the reviewers also conclude that Macnamara has ability as a playwright. As the writer for the *Westminster Gazette* proclaims:

Though none of her characters are as finely drawn as that of the minister, considerable ability is shown in handling all, even, indeed, a purely comic character – that of the selfish, hard mother of Alice.[38]

The reviewer for *The Academy* similarly notes the finesse of the playwright as she interweaves an argument into the play's action:

When I say there is a ruthlessness in the argument that reminded me of Ibsen, and a wittiness in the dialogue that was reminiscent of Bernard Shaw, I am trying to express my feeling that, even, if imperfect, *The Gates of the Morning* is a genuine work of art.[39]

To be likened to Ibsen and Shaw was a compliment indeed for any playwright.

Macnamara as a 'New Woman'

Housed in the University of Bristol Women's Theatre Collection, Macnamara's work lies largely undiscovered by today's theatre historians and feminist writers. It is a remarkable collection that shows her depth and quality as a writer, taking on varied subjects and topics with great ability, enthusiasm, and care. These included issues that were of particular concern for her fellow Fabians, such as housing shortages and inadequate government provision, embracing pacifism, opposing the cruelty of eugenics, and, most significantly, the place of women in society and the family.

She wrote for different audiences and in many genres. Her activism in the Women's Institute of Henfield attests to her feminist inclination to demonstrate the power of women who are determined to take action in a society that was still governed by men. Most of all, through her connections with Shaw and Granville Barker, Macnamara was able to represent women on stage as written by women.

Being openly feminist was difficult during Macnamara's life. Gillian Sutherland argues that the reality of life for middle-class women at the turn of the twentieth century differed radically from romanticized notions of the 'New Woman'.[40] Such women were engaged in a day-to-day struggle to work outside the home, and, in doing so, faced the choice between being considered a 'lady' or a 'woman'; they struggled vociferously for careers that paid very little, especially in the case of those who worked in the theatre.[41] Still often regarded as prostitutes, such 'New Woman' writers as Elizabeth Robins had to fend off sexual advances from male colleagues, including Shaw himself.[42]

Female actors and writers usually had to have other means of support, as their careers did not afford them the opportunity to

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support themselves independently.[43] This revised concept of the 'New Woman' gives a fresh understanding of the harsh realities of life during the period and, in particular, contextualizes Macnamara's own experiences. She died at sixty-seven with only a small sum of money left from her work as a writer and, as a single woman, her life highlights the ongoing social stigma. Indeed, she would have been considered an 'old maid' or an 'odd woman'. Yet, despite these struggles, she continued her work as a writer, researcher, and playwright, and is well deserving of attention from contemporary writers on theatre for her representations of women upon the stage.

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