

= John Barrymore =

John Barrymore (born John Sidney Blyth ; February 14 or 15 , 1882 ? May 29 , 1942) was an American actor on stage , screen and radio . A member of the Drew and Barrymore theatrical families , he initially tried to avoid the stage , and briefly attempted a career as an artist , but appeared on stage together with his father Maurice in 1900 , and then his sister Ethel the following year . He began his career in 1903 and first gained attention as a stage actor in light comedy , then high drama , culminating in productions of Justice (1916) , Richard III (1920) and Hamlet (1922) ; his portrayal of Hamlet led to him being called the " greatest living American tragedian " .

After a success as Hamlet in London in 1925 , Barrymore left the stage for 14 years and instead focused entirely on films . In the silent film era , he was well received in such pictures as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1920) , Sherlock Holmes (1922) and The Sea Beast (1926) . During this period , he gained his nickname , the Great Profile . His stage @-@ trained voice proved an asset when sound films were introduced , and three of his works , Grand Hotel (1932) , Twentieth Century (1934) and Midnight (1939) have been inducted into the National Film Registry .

Barrymore 's personal life has been the subject of much attention before and since his death . He struggled with alcohol abuse from the age of 14 , was married and divorced four times , and declared bankruptcy later in life . Much of his later work involved self @-@ parody and the portrayal of drunken has @-@ beens . His obituary in The Washington Post observed that " with the passing of the years ? and as his private life became more public ? he became , despite his genius in the theater , a tabloid character . " Although film historians have opined that Barrymore 's " contribution to the art of cinematic acting began to fade " after the mid @-@ 1930s , Barrymore 's biographer , Martin Norden , considers him to be " perhaps the most influential and idolized actor of his day " .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life : 1882 ? 1903 = = =

Barrymore was born John Sidney Blyth in Philadelphia , and was known by family and friends as " Jack " . Although the Barrymore family bible puts his date of birth as February 15 , 1882 , his birth certificate shows February 14 . He was the youngest of three children . His siblings were Lionel (1878 @-@ 1954) , and Ethel (1879 @-@ 1959) . His father was Maurice Barrymore , an Indian @-@ born British actor who had been born Herbert Blyth , and had adopted Barrymore as a stage name after seeing it on a poster in the Haymarket Theatre in London . Barrymore 's mother , Georgie Drew Barrymore , was born into a prominent theatrical family . Barrymore 's maternal grandparents were Louisa Lane Drew , a well @-@ known 19th @-@ century American actress and the manager of the Arch Street Theatre , and John Drew , also an actor whose specialty was comedy . Barrymore 's maternal uncles were two more thespians , John Drew , Jr. and Sidney .

Much of Barrymore 's early life was unsettled . In October 1882 , the family toured in the US for a season with Polish actress Helena Modjeska . The following year his parents toured again with Modjeska but left the children behind . Modjeska was influential in the family , and she insisted that all three children be baptized into the Catholic Church . In 1884 the family traveled to London as part of Augustin Daly 's theatrical company , returning to the US two years later . As a child , Barrymore was sometimes badly behaved , and he was sent away to schools in an attempt to instill discipline . The strategy was not always successful , and he attended elementary schools in four states . He was sent first to the boys ' annex of the Convent of Notre Dame in Philadelphia . One punishment that he received there was being made to read a copy of Dante 's Inferno ; he later recounted that , as he looked at the illustrations by Gustave Doré , " my interest was aroused , and a new urge was born within me . I wanted to be an artist " . He was expelled from the school in 1891 and was sent to Seton Hall Preparatory School in New Jersey , where Lionel was already studying . Barrymore was unhappy at Seton and was soon withdrawn , after which he attended several public schools in New York , including the Mount Pleasant Military Academy .

In 1892 , his grandmother Louisa Drew 's business began to suffer , and she lost control of her theater , causing disruption in the family . The following year , when Barrymore was 11 years old , his mother died from tuberculosis ; her consistent touring and his absence at school meant that he barely knew her , and he was mostly raised by his grandmother . The loss of their mother 's income prompted both Ethel and Lionel to seek work as professional actors . Barrymore 's father was mostly absent from the family home while on tour , and when he returned he would spend time at The Lambs , a New York actors ' club .

In 1895 , Barrymore entered Georgetown Preparatory School , then located on Georgetown University Campus , but he was expelled in November 1897 , probably after being caught waiting in a brothel . One of his biographers , Michael A. Morrison , posits the alternate theory that Barrymore was expelled after the staff saw him inebriated . By the time he left Georgetown he was , according to Martin Norden in his biography of Barrymore , " already in the early stages of a chronic drinking problem " . 1897 was an emotionally challenging year for Barrymore : he lost his virginity when he was seduced by his step @-@ mother , Mamie Floyd , and in August his grandmother , the main female role model in his life , died .

Barrymore traveled with his father to England in 1898 , where he joined King 's College School , Wimbledon . A year later he joined the Slade School of Fine Art , to study literature and art . After a year of formal study , he left and " devoted much of his subsequent stay in London to bohemianism and nocturnal adventures " , according to his biographer Margot Peters . Barrymore returned to New York in the summer of 1900 , and by November he found work as an illustrator on The New York Evening Journal , at a salary of \$ 50 a week .

Barrymore had always professed a dislike of the acting profession , but in 1900 he was persuaded by his father to join him on stage for a few performances of a short play , " A Man of the World " . He appeared in the same piece again the following year , but he still thought of the experience as merely a way to supplement his income , rather than as a possible future career . In October 1901 , Ethel was appearing in Philadelphia in Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines when one of the younger actors became temporarily unavailable . She persuaded the director to allow Barrymore to accept the part of the minor character , and Barrymore traveled from New York , learning his lines on the train . In the first act , he stopped in the middle of his dialogue , unable to remember the text , and asked the audience and his fellow actors , " I 've blown up . Where do we go from here ? " , which led the cast to improvise the remainder of the scene .

An incident in 1901 had a major impact on Barrymore . In March , his father had a mental breakdown as a result of tertiary syphilis , and Barrymore took him to Bellevue hospital . He was later transferred to a private institution in Amityville , Long Island , where he suffered a " rapid descent into madness " . The Encyclopedia of World Biography states that Barrymore was constantly " haunted by the bright and dark spell of his father " , and his close friend Gene Fowler reported that " the bleak overtone of this breaking of his parent 's reason never quite died away in Barrymore 's mind , and he was haunted by fears he would suffer the same fate " . The same year , Barrymore began an affair with a beautiful artists ' model , " Florodora girl " and aspiring actress named Evelyn Nesbit , who was a mistress of architect Stanford White . Barrymore later described Nesbit as " the most maddening woman She was the first woman I ever loved " , and he proposed marriage to her . Nesbit 's mother did not think that , as a struggling artist , Barrymore was a good match for her daughter . To break off their relationship her mother sent Nesbit away to school in New Jersey . In 1906 , White was shot in public by Nesbit 's then @-@ husband , Pittsburgh millionaire Harry K. Thaw . Barrymore expected to testify at Thaw 's murder trial on the issue of Nesbit 's morality ; he worried that he might be asked whether he had arranged for Nesbit to have an abortion , disguised as an appendectomy , even though Nesbit had undergone two previous " appendectomies " . Barrymore was never called as a witness because Thaw pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity .

In May 1902 , Barrymore was fired from his newspaper position after producing a poor illustration for the paper while hung over . He spent time as a poster designer but realized it was not lucrative enough for his lifestyle , which was being partly financed by Ethel , who was also paying for their father 's care . While discussing his future with his brother , Barrymore said " it looks as though I 'll

have to succumb to the family curse , acting " , and he later admitted that " there isn 't any romance about how I went on stage I needed the money . "

= = = Early stage career : 1903 ? 13 = = =

Barrymore began to contact his family 's theatrical connections to find work and approached Charles Frohman , who had been the producer of Captain Jinks and had also been an employer of Barrymore 's mother Georgie a decade earlier . Frohman thought that Barrymore had comedic potential but needed more experience before making a Broadway debut . Barrymore joined the company of McKee Rankin , Sidney Drew 's father @-@ in @-@ law , on the Chicago leg of their tour , at the W. S. Cleveland Theatre in October 1903 . He first played the minor role of Lt. Max von Wendlowski in Magda , and in November when the troupe produced Leah the Forsaken , he took the small part of Max , a village idiot with one spoken line .

A year later Barrymore appeared in his first Broadway production , in a small role in the comedy Glad of It , which only had a short run . Afterwards he played the role of Charles Hyne in the farce The Dictator at the Criterion Theatre , which starred William Collier . During the play 's run and subsequent tour across the US , Collier became a mentor to the young actor , although his patience was continually tested by Barrymore 's drinking , which led to occasional missed performances , drunken stage appearances , and general misbehavior . Collier taught Barrymore much about acting , including coaching him in comic timing , but " at times regretted his sponsorship " of his apprentice . In March 1905 , while The Dictator was playing in Buffalo , Barrymore 's father died in Amityville and was buried at Glenwood Cemetery in Philadelphia . At the close of the US tour , The Dictator visited Britain from April 1905 , where it played at the Comedy Theatre . The critic for The Observer wrote that Barrymore " admirably seconded " Collier .

When he returned to America , Barrymore appeared at the Criterion Theatre in a double bill of works by J. M. Barrie ; he played a clown in Pantaloon opposite his brother , and Stephen Rollo in Alice Sit @-@ by @-@ the @-@ Fire opposite his sister . Both plays ran for 81 performances from December 1905 , and then went on tour . Barrymore continued drinking and lacked discipline , which affected his performances . Ethel was angry with her brother and had the producers fire him from the show , but re @-@ hire him the following day , to teach him a lesson . After a tour of the US and Australia with Collier in On the Quiet and The Dictator , Barrymore joined his sister in the 1907 comedy His Excellency the Governor at the Empire Theatre . He received mixed reviews for his performances , and The Wichita Daily Eagle commented that " Barrymore seems to imitate John Drew too much ever to be a good actor . Why doesn 't young Barrymore imitate a real actor if he must copy someone . "

Barrymore gained his first leading role in early 1907 , in the comedy The Boys of Company B at the Lyceum Theatre . Although he was well received by the critics ? The Washington Post noted that " his work has been pronounced astonishingly clever by the critics wherever he played " ? at times he continued his unprofessional stage behavior , which led to a rebuke from John Drew , who attended a performance . After a short run in Toddles at the Garrick Theatre , Barrymore was given the lead role of Mac in A Stubborn Cinderella , both on tour and at the Broadway Theatre in Boston . He had previously been earning \$ 50 a week during his sporadic employment but now enjoyed a wage increase to \$ 175 . He briefly appeared in The Candy Shop in mid @-@ 1909 , before he played the lead role in Winchell Smith 's play The Fortune Hunter at the Gaiety Theatre in September the same year . It was his longest @-@ held role , running for 345 performances until May 1911 , initially at the Gaiety Theatre in New York , and then on tour . The critic for The New York Times thought the play was , " acted with fine comedy spirit by John Barrymore ... [who] gave indisputable signs last night of grown and growing powers . "

In mid @-@ 1910 Barrymore met socialite Katherine Corri Harris , and the couple married in September that year . Harris ' father objected to the relationship and refused to attend the wedding . Shortly after the ceremony , The Dictator went on tour , and Harris was given a small role in the play . According to Peters , Barrymore " began to think of his marriage as a ' bus accident ' " . Film critic Hollis Alpert wrote that , within a week of the wedding , Katherine was complaining that she saw her

new husband too infrequently . Barrymore 's increasing dependence on alcohol was also a cause of marital problems , and he explained that " unhappiness increased the drink , and drink increased the unhappiness " .

Barrymore 's next two plays ? Uncle Sam and Princess Zim @-@ Zim , both from 1911 ? were critically and commercially weak , but the second work introduced him to playwright Edward Sheldon , who would " reshape ... [Barrymore 's] entire career " . In January 1912 , Barrymore appeared together with his sister in A Slice of Life at the Empire Theatre on Broadway , which ran for 48 performances . Charles Darnton , a critic for The Evening World , observed that " Barrymore takes delight in ' kidding ' his part not only to the limit , but perhaps beyond " . A review in The Washington Times stated that " Barrymore inimitably imitates his uncle John Drew " .

Barrymore may have appeared in his first films in 1912 . In four short films , a cast member is listed as " Jack Barrymore " ; this is probably John Barrymore , although Norden notes that " we may never know for certain if [these] are in fact Barrymore movies . " The four films were Dream of a Motion Picture Director , The Widow Casey 's Return , A Prize Package (all 1912) and One on Romance (1913) . The films were produced by the Philadelphia @-@ based Lubin Manufacturing Company and were lost in an explosion and fire at the Lubin vaults in 1914 .

In July 1912 , Barrymore went to Los Angeles , where he appeared in three short @-@ running plays at the Belasco Theatre . He returned to New York in October , where he took the lead role in 72 performances of the comedy The Affairs of Anatol at the Little Theatre . Although the critical response was lukewarm , Barrymore 's salary for the play was \$ 600 a week . He began the following year by appearing in a short run of A Thief for a Night in McVicker 's Theatre , Chicago , before returning to New York , and the Thirty @-@ Ninth St. Theatre , for a two @-@ month run in Believe Me Xantippe .

= = = Entry into motion pictures , and theatrical triumphs : 1913 ? 24 = = =

In late 1913 , Barrymore made his first confirmed feature film , the romantic comedy An American Citizen , with Adolph Zukor 's Famous Players Film Company . When the film was released in January 1914 , Barrymore " delighted movie audiences with an inimitable light touch that made a conventional romance ' joyous ' , " writes Peters . A reviewer for The Oregon Daily Journal thought that Barrymore gave a " portrayal of unusual quality " . The success of the picture led to further film work , including The Man from Mexico (1914) , Are You a Mason ? , The Dictator and The Incurable Dukane (all 1915) . Except for The Incurable Dukane , all of these early films are presumed lost .

Despite the film work and the higher fees he earned from it , Barrymore continued to seek stage work , and in January 1914 he played the lead in The Yellow Ticket at New York 's Eltinge Theatre . The role marked a departure from the light comedy of his previous performances , a result of Sheldon urging him to turn towards more dramatic parts . The Yellow Ticket was not the breakthrough that Barrymore wanted . A few months before the outbreak of World War One , he took a vacation to Italy with Sheldon to enjoy a temporary break from his worsening marriage . He returned from Italy and accepted another serious stage role , that of an ex @-@ convict in Kick In , at New York 's Longacre Theatre . The play was a success , and Barrymore received praise from the critics ; The New York Times reviewer thought that in a play that had " uncommonly able and sincere playing " , Barrymore acted his role with " intelligence and vigor and impart [ed] to it a deal of charm " .

Barrymore spent the second half of 1915 making three films , including The Red Widow , which he called " the worst film I ever made " in his 1926 autobiography . In April 1916 , he starred in John Galsworthy 's prison drama Justice , again at the instigation of Sheldon . The play was a critical success , and The New York Times thought the audience saw " Barrymore play as he had never played before , and so , by his work as the wretched prisoner in Justice , step forward into a new position on the American stage . " The critic went on to say that Barrymore gave " an extraordinary performance in every detail of appearance and manner , in every note of deep feeling ... a superb performance . "

From early 1916 , Barrymore had been living apart from Katherine , and she sued for divorce in November 1916 . By the time the divorce was finalized in December 1917 , he had taken the lead role in the film Raffles , the Amateur Cracksman . He had also tried to enlist in the U.S. Army following the country 's entry into World War I , but Army doctors revealed that he had varicose veins , and he was not accepted for military service . For over a year beginning in April 1917 , he appeared together with Lionel in a stage version of George du Maurier 's 1891 novel Peter Ibbetson . The play and the two Barrymores were warmly regarded by the critics . Around this time , Barrymore began a relationship with a married mother of two , Blanche Oelrichs , a suffragist from an elite Rhode Island family with what Peters calls " anarchistic self @-@ confidence " . Oelrichs also published poetry under the name Michael Strange . While their relationship began in secret , it became more open after Oelrichs ' husband was commissioned into the army and then posted to France .

Both Oelrichs and Sheldon urged Barrymore to take on his next role , Fedya Vasilyevich Protasov , in Leo Tolstoy 's play Redemption at the Plymouth Theatre . The critic for The New York Times felt that , although Barrymore 's performance was " marred by vocal monotony " , overall the performance was " a distinct step forward in Mr. Barrymore 's artistic development ... There is probably not another actor on our stage who has a temperament so fine and spiritual , an art so flexible and sure . " In 1918 , Barrymore starred in the romantic comedy film On the Quiet ; the Iowa City Press @-@ Citizen considered the film superior to the original Broadway performance .

In 1919 , Barrymore portrayed a struggling lawyer in the film adaptation of the Broadway show Here Comes the Bride , which he followed with The Test of Honor . The latter film marked his first straight dramatic role on screen after years of performing in comedy dramas . Later that year , when Barrymore again appeared on stage with Lionel in Sem Benelli 's historical drama The Jest , audience members " agree [d] that the American stage had never witnessed finer acting " , according to Peters . Alexander Woollcott , writing in The New York Times , thought that " John and Lionel Barrymore hold spellbound each breathless audience " , and he commented that Barrymore " contributes to that appeal by every step , every hand , every posture of a body grown unexpectedly eloquent in recent years " . In November , Barrymore began filming Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde , playing the dual leading role , and the film was released in theaters the following year . Wid 's Daily thought that " it is the star 's picture from the very outset , and it is the star that makes it " , going on to say that Barrymore 's portrayal was " a thing of fine shadows and violent emotions " . The Washington Post was in agreement , and considered the performance to be " a masterpiece " , and " a remarkable piece of work " . The film was so successful that the US Navy used stills of Barrymore in its recruiting posters .

After planning for over a year ? largely in secret ? Barrymore played his first Shakespeare part , the title role in Richard III . Conscious of the criticism of his vocal range , he underwent training with Margaret Carrington , the voice and diction trainer , to ensure he sounded right for the part , and the pair worked together daily for up to six hours a day for six weeks . After the debut in March 1920 , the critics were effusive in their praise . The Washington Herald observed that the audience were " held by the sheer power of Barrymore 's performance " , which was " remarkable for ... [the actor 's] unexpected vocal richness " , while Woollcott , in The New York Times , thought the performance " marked a measurable advance in the gradual process of bringing [Barrymore 's] technical fluency abreast with his winged imagination and his real genius for the theatre " .

Although a commercial and critical success , the play closed after 31 performances when Barrymore collapsed , suffering a nervous breakdown . Since appearing in Redemption he had worked ceaselessly , appearing on stage in the evenings , while planning or rehearsing the next production during the day , and by the time he appeared as Richard , he was spending his daytimes filming Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde . He spent six weeks recuperating under the ministrations of his father 's friend , wrestler William Muldoon , who ran a sanitarium . During the summer of 1920 , Oelrichs became pregnant with Barrymore 's child , and a quick divorce was arranged with her husband , which left her and Barrymore free to marry in August that year ; a daughter , Diana Barrymore , followed in March 1921 . Soon after the birth , he began rehearsals for Clair de Lune , which his wife had adapted from Victor Hugo 's 1869 novel The Man Who Laughs . Barrymore

persuaded Ethel to play the role of the Queen ? it was the first time the two had appeared on stage together in over a decade . The play was a critical flop , although the presence of the siblings ensured that it ran for over 60 performances .

In 1921 , Barrymore portrayed a wealthy Frenchman in New York in the film *The Lotus Eater* , with Colleen Moore . In September , Barrymore and Oelrichs went to Europe on holiday ; cracks were appearing in their relationship , and she fell in love with a poet during their extended stay in Venice . In October , Oelrichs returned to New York and Barrymore traveled to London to film the exterior scenes for his latest movie , *Sherlock Holmes* , in which he played the title role . He then returned to New York to work on the film 's interior scenes in January 1922 . Barrymore became involved in the pre - production work for the film and provided designs for Moriarty 's lair . The film was released later that year and was generally thought " a little dull and ponderous , with too many intertitles " , although James W. Dean of *The Evening News* of Harrisburg opined that " the personality of Barrymore is the film 's transcendent quality " .

Barrymore decided next to star in *Hamlet* on stage , with Arthur Hopkins directing . They spent six months preparing , cutting over 1 @, @ 250 lines from the text as they did so , and Barrymore opted to play Hamlet as " a man 's man " , according to Norden . Barrymore later described his Hamlet as a " normal , healthy , lusty young fellow who simply got into a mess that was too thick for him ... he was a great fencer , an athlete , a man who led an active , healthy life . How can you make a sickly half @-@ wit out of a man like that ? " Barrymore again used Carrington as a vocal coach ; rehearsals started in October , and the play opened on November 16 . The production was a box @-@ office success , and the critics were lavish in their praise . Woolcott , writing for the *New York Herald* , opined that it was " an evening that will be memorable in the history of the American theater " . while John Corbin , the drama critic for *The New York Times* , agreed , writing that " in all likelihood we have a new and a lasting Hamlet " . The reviewer for *Brooklyn Life* stated that Barrymore had " doubtless won the right to be called the greatest living American tragedian " . In 1963 , Orson Welles said that Barrymore was the best Hamlet he had seen , describing the character as " not so much princely ? he was a man of genius who happened to be a prince , and he was tender , and virile , and witty , and dangerous " .

Barrymore and Hopkins decided to end the run at 101 performances , just breaking the record of one hundred by Edwin Booth , before the play closed in February 1923 . In November and December that year , a three @-@ week run of the play was staged at the Manhattan Opera House , followed by a brief tour that closed at the end of January 1924 .

= = = Films with the major studios : 1924 ? 32 = = =

News of Barrymore 's success in *Hamlet* piqued the interest of Warner Bros. , which signed him as the lead in the 1924 film *Beau Brummel* . Unhappy in his marriage , Barrymore ? aged 40 at the time ? sought solace elsewhere and had an affair with his 17 @-@ year @-@ old co @-@ star Mary Astor during filming . Although the film was not an unqualified success , the cast , including Barrymore , was generally praised . Around this time , Barrymore acquired the nickname " the Great Profile " , as posters and photographs of him tended to favor the left @-@ hand side . He later said : " The right side of my face looks like a fried egg . The left side has features that are to be found in almost any normal anthropological specimen , and those are the apples I try to keep on top of the barrel . "

In February 1925 , Barrymore staged *Hamlet* in London at the Haymarket Theatre , which the *Manchester Guardian* later said had " the most memorable first night for years " . The reviews were positive , and " although none of the London critics found Barrymore superior to [Henry] Irving and [Johnston] Forbes @-@ Robertson , many were favorable in their comparisons " . Among the audience members was the 20 @-@ year @-@ old actor John Gielgud , who wrote in his program " Barrymore is romantic in appearance and naturally gifted with grace , looks and a capacity to wear period clothes , which makes his brilliantly intellectual performance classical without being unduly severe , and he has tenderness , remoteness , and neurosis all placed with great delicacy and used with immense effectiveness and admirable judgment " . Looking back in the 1970s , he said : " The

handsome middle-aged stars of the Edwardian theatre romanticised the part . Even John Barrymore , whose Hamlet I admired very much , cut the play outrageously so that he could , for instance , play the closet scene all out for sentiment with the emphasis on the ' Oedipus complex ' ? sobbing on Gertrude 's bosom . Yet Barrymore ... had a wonderful edge and a demonic sense of humour . "

At the end of this run of Hamlet , Barrymore traveled to Paris , where Oelrichs had stayed during his residence in London , but the reunion was not a happy one and the couple argued frequently . When he returned to America , she remained in Paris , and the couple drew up a separation agreement that provided Oelrichs with \$ 18 @, @ 000 a year and stated that neither could sue for divorce on the grounds of adultery . While he had been in London , Warner Bros and Barrymore entered into a contract for three further films at a salary of \$ 76 @, @ 250 per picture . He later claimed that his motivation for moving from stage to films was the " lack of repetition ? the continual playing of a part , which is so ruinous to an actor , is entirely eliminated " .

Barrymore 's first film under the contract was The Sea Beast (1926) , loosely based on the 1851 novel Moby @-@ Dick , in which he played Captain Ahab Ceeley . This was one of the biggest money @-@ makers of the year for Warner Bros. Although Barrymore wanted Astor to play the female lead , she was unavailable , and Dolores Costello was cast in her place . He later said that " I fell in love with her instantly . This time I knew I was right " , and the couple began an affair . Costello 's father was angered by the relationship , but his complaints were ignored by both Costello and her mother : Costello 's parents separated and were divorced as a result . The film was well received by critics , and Mordaunt Hall , the film critic of The New York Times , praised the " energy , earnestness and virility " Barrymore displayed in the role of Ceeley .

As filming finished on The Sea Beast , work began on Don Juan , the first feature @-@ length film with synchronized Vitaphone sound effects and a musical soundtrack . Although Barrymore wanted to play opposite Costello again , Jack L. Warner , the film 's producer , signed Astor . After completing his Warner Bros. contract with When a Man Loves , with Costello , Barrymore joined United Artists (UA) under a three @-@ film deal . For the next three years , according to Morrison , he " enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and spent lavishly " . Nevertheless , he received some harsh reviews . Critic and essayist Stark Young wrote in The New Republic that Barrymore 's films were " rotten , vulgar , empty , in bad taste , dishonest , noisome with a silly and unwholesome exhibitionism , and odious with a kind of stale and degenerate studio adolescence . Their appeal is cheap , cynical and specious " .

In 1927 , Barrymore planned to revive Hamlet at the Hollywood Bowl , but in August he canceled the production , without explanation , and began filming the third of the UA pictures , Eternal Love , for which he was paid \$ 150 @, @ 000 . In February 1928 , Barrymore obtained a quiet divorce from Oelrichs ; she eagerly agreed to the separation , as she was in a relationship with a lawyer , Harrison Tweed , whom she later married . Barrymore and Costello married in November that year ; their daughter , Dolores , was born in April 1930 and a son , John Drew Barrymore , followed in June 1932 . Barrymore purchased and converted an estate in the Hollywood Hills into 16 different buildings with 55 rooms , gardens , skeet ranges , swimming pools , fountains and a totem pole .

By the late 1920s , sound films had become common , following the 1927 sensation , The Jazz Singer . Actors with trained voices were in demand by the studios , and Barrymore was offered a five @-@ film deal with Warner Bros. at \$ 150 @, @ 000 per picture , and a share of the profits . Before he began this contract , he played his first speaking role on film : a one @-@ off section in The Show of Shows (1929) , playing Richard , Duke of Gloucester in Henry VI , Part 3 . His first two films under contract were General Crack and The Man from Blankley 's , each of which were modestly successful . As he had been frustrated at the inability of making The Sea Beast as a sound film , Barrymore returned to Moby Dick as the source for a 1930 film of the same name . Peters thinks little of the film , describing it as " a seesaw between the cosmic and the comic , a travesty of Melville as well as a silly film all on its own " .

The following year , Barrymore played the title role of a manipulative voice coach in Svengali , opposite Marian Marsh . Martin Dickstein , the critic for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle , wrote that Barrymore " registers a personal triumph in the role " , calling his performance " brilliant ... one of the

best of his movie career " . Later in 1931 , he played a crippled puppeteer , who tries to fulfill his frustrated ambitions by manipulating the life of a young male ballet dancer and the dancer 's lover (also Marsh) in The Mad Genius ; the film was a commercial failure . With disappointing box office returns from their five @-@ film deal , Warner Bros. decided not to offer Barrymore a contract renewal . Instead , Barrymore signed a non @-@ exclusive contract with Metro @-@ Goldwyn @-@ Mayer (MGM) and took a \$ 25 @,@ 000 salary cut per film .

= = = Years of transition : 1932 ? 36 = = =

Barrymore 's first film for MGM was the 1933 mystery Arsène Lupin , in which he co @-@ starred with his brother Lionel . In The New York Times , Hall called Barrymore 's performance " admirable " and wrote that " it is a pleasure to see [him] again in something in a lighter vein . " The same year , Barrymore starred as jewel thief Baron Felix von Geigern together with Greta Garbo in the 1932 film Grand Hotel , in which Lionel also appeared . Critical opinion of Barrymore 's acting was divided ; John Gilbert 's biographer Eve Golden refers to Barrymore as seeming " more like ... [Garbo 's] affectionate father than her lover " , while George Blaisdell of International Photographer praised the dialogue and wrote that a viewer would be " deeply impressed with the rarity in screen drama on which he is looking . " Grand Hotel won the Academy Award for Best Picture and was one of the highest @-@ grossing films of the year . It was later added to the National Film Registry .

In 1932 , Barrymore appeared in three films . For RKO Pictures he played a borderline @-@ alcoholic lawyer in State 's Attorney , before he returned to MGM to play an escaped lunatic in A Bill of Divorcement , opposite Katharine Hepburn in her screen debut . Film scholar Daniel Bernardi later noted the humanism demonstrated between Barrymore 's character and his family , particularly the " close bond " between father and daughter . In his final film of the year , Rasputin and the Empress , Barrymore , Ethel and Lionel co @-@ starred . Physically , Barrymore had deteriorated since filming Svengali , and he had gained weight because of his drinking . Peters notes the " dissipation of the once ascetic face , a dissipation only underlined by the studio 's attempt to reconstruct with lights , filters and make @-@ up a spiritual beauty that had been corrupted . " The film was a critical and commercial failure , and MGM lost significant amounts of money . The New Yorker thought the three Barrymores had produced their worst work .

The year 1933 was a busy one for Barrymore , and his decline began to be evident . He appeared in five films during the year , including as a meek schoolteacher @-@ turned @-@ businessman in Topaze , opposite Myrna Loy , and Dinner at Eight , with Lionel . Peters opines that Barrymore 's portrayal of a washed @-@ up alcoholic actor " could well have fixed ... in the public 's and MGM 's mind that John Barrymore was a drunken has @-@ been . " After the run of films with MGM , the company ended its contact with Barrymore amid its financial woes caused by the Great Depression . He then signed with Universal Studios to portray a troubled Jewish lawyer in Counsellor at Law . During filming he struggled to remember his lines for even small scenes . Filming was stopped on one occasion after more than 25 takes when he struggled to recall the right lines ; it was a problem with which he began to suffer regularly . Despite the problems , Norden believes that this was " one of his best film performances " .

In December 1933 , Barrymore agreed with RKO to film Hamlet . He underwent screen tests and hired Carrington to act as vocal coach again , but during one session , his memory failed him again , and the project was eventually scrapped . Barrymore starred in two films released in 1934 , the drama Long Lost Father and the screwball comedy Twentieth Century . In the latter film , Barrymore played madcap Broadway impresario Oscar Jaffe , a role in which he demonstrated a " rare genius as a comedian " . Morrison writes that the portrayal was one " that many consider to be his finest contribution to film " . In 2011 , the picture was added to the National Film Registry , where it was described as Barrymore 's " last great film role " .

In May 1934 , Barrymore was filming Hat , Coat and Glove for RKO when , during the filming of one scene , he again forgot his lines and even the name of his character . Filming was postponed until the following day , but the result was the same . After he took a break for a few days , he returned to the set , but he still could not remember any of the script , and RKO replaced him with Ricardo

Cortez . Soon afterwards , he suffered a mental and physical breakdown and was hospitalized . Costello confirmed that his drinking over the previous two years had worsened , and she described him as a " hopeless alcoholic " . Barrymore 's relationship with Costello was deeply troubled and , believing she was going to declare him mentally incompetent , he left their home in Los Angeles and traveled first to London and then to India . He returned to the US in early 1935 and settled in New York , leaving his wife in Los Angeles . Shortly after his return , he was hospitalized for a month with bronchitis and influenza . A 19 @-@ year @-@ old fan , Elaine Jacobs , visited him , and the two became good friends . On his release from the hospital , her mother invited him to recuperate at their house . She changed her name to Elaine Barrie , which she explained was to get " as near to Barrymore as I dared " , and they began a relationship . In May , the couple underwent the first of several professional collaborations , when they appeared on Rudy Vallée 's The Fleischmann 's Yeast Hour radio show .

The relationship was widely reported in the tabloid press , who labeled the couple Caliban and Ariel . Costello filed for divorce , but after a series of arguments with Barrie , Barrymore considered the relationship with Barrie to be at an end , and he left for Los Angeles . A newspaper editor chartered a plane and flew Barrie to Chicago , to meet Barrymore 's train ; she broadcast a plea for him to return , and her pursuit became national news . Morrison thinks that the headlines established a new reputation for Barrymore of " the aging satyr , the has @-@ been alcoholic , the much @-@ married ham " . This was a blow to his self @-@ respect , but he faced his troubles " with aplomb and a sense of humor " , according to Morrison . To escape from the spotlight , Barrymore took vacations on his yacht ; it cost him over \$ 35 @,@ 000 a year to run , and so he sold it in 1938 after encountering financial difficulties .

= = = Decline and death : 1936 ? 42 = = =

Barrymore 's alcohol dependence meant most studios were unwilling to employ him , but MGM risked casting him in the role of Mercutio in their 1936 film Romeo and Juliet . To minimize disruption to the schedule , the studio put Barrymore in Kelley 's Rest Home , a sanatorium for alcoholics , but he continued to drink covertly and was disruptive on set . Basil Rathbone , who was playing Tybalt , later recounted that " he was drinking and unreliable on the set ... It was sad to see him in such a state . " Opinions on his portrayal were divided . Some critics , such as Welford Beaton of the Hollywood Spectator , thought " Barrymore is an acting gem " , although Gielgud was uncomplimentary , writing to Peggy Ashcroft that " Barrymore , who is like a monstrous old male impersonator jumping through a hoop , should really have been shot . "

Word about Barrymore 's problems on and off the set spread around the industry , and he did not work on another film for over a year , when he had a supporting role in the musical film Maytime . His divorce from Costello was finalized in October 1936 , and he married Barrie in November the same year . The couple had a heated argument in public shortly afterwards , and he again spent time in Kelley 's Rest Home and hospital , which cost him an average of \$ 800 daily , draining his finances . When he came out , he collapsed on the Maytime set . On January 15 , 1937 , he was served with divorce papers , and a month later he filed for bankruptcy protection , with debts of \$ 160 @,@ 000 . The divorce was granted in April , but the couple reconciled before it was finalized .

Barrymore decided to work on more Shakespeare roles . In June 1937 , he signed up with NBC Radio to produce a series of six episodes under the name Streamlined Shakespeare , which also featured Barrie . The first program was Hamlet , which was well received by critics . The New York Times commented that " Shakespeare 's lines uttered dramatically by the voice of John Barrymore sweep through the ' ether ' with a sound of finality ; it seems that they are his words and no one else could speak them with such lifelike force " . Peters disagrees however , and considers that " because he was desperate he pressed too hard and ended by caricaturing , not capturing , his great Shakespearean acting " .

Throughout the NBC series , Barrymore had been reliable , sober and responsible , and the studios reacted positively with offers of work . This led to appearances in nine films in 1937 and 1938 , including as Colonel Nielson in three Bulldog Drummond films , and roles in True Confession and

Marie Antoinette . He was offered predominantly supporting roles , but he worked conscientiously on the films and as a consequence was able to honor his debts . His memory was still problematic , and he used cue cards as an aid ; his fellow actors and the directors of the films were sympathetic to his condition . When he filmed his last serious role , Gregory Vance in the 1939 film *The Great Man Votes* , the director , Garson Kanin , ensured that the cast and crew addressed him as " Mr. Barrymore " as a mark of respect .

Barrymore and his wife both appeared in supporting roles in the 1939 screwball comedy *Midnight* , her only film role . The *New York Times* thought the film was " one of the liveliest , gayest , wittiest and naughtiest comedies of a long hard season " and that Barrymore , " the [Lou] Gehrig of eye @-@ brow batting , rolls his phrases with his usual richly humorous effect " . The film was inducted into the National Film Registry in 2013 . Barrymore and his wife appeared together in the stage farce *My Dear Children* , which opened in March 1939 at Princeton University 's McCarter Theatre . He played the lead role , Allan Manville , an ageing hammy Shakespearean has @-@ been . Because of his failing memory , Barrymore ad @-@ libbed constantly throughout the show . In some points the new additions were an improvement , but he also greeted friends in the audience , and used profanities freely . Nevertheless , the show was a success . *Life* magazine wrote that " People flock to see [Barrymore] , not for polished performance , but because he converts the theater into a rowdy histrionic madhouse . Sometimes he arrives late . Sometimes he is tight . Usually he forgets his lines . But he always puts on a great show . " When the show reached Broadway , *Life* wrote that " Barrymore 's return to Times Square was a huge professional triumph " . Brooks Atkinson , writing for *The New York Times* thought that Barrymore was " still the most gifted actor in this country Although he has recklessly played the fool for a number of years , he is nobody 's fool in *My Dear Children* but a superbly gifted actor on a tired holiday . " Barrymore and his wife continued to argue during the play 's run , and she left the play part way through the tour . They attempted a reconciliation when the production reached New York , but the couple divorced in late 1940 .

In 1940 , Barrymore appeared in *The Great Profile* , a spoof of his life in the months prior to *My Dear Children* . Barrymore played Evans Garrick , closely modeled on his own experience , and Mary Beth Hughes played his wife . The critics reacted harshly to the film , and to Barrymore 's association with it . The *New York Times* wrote that " As a play it is a feeble thing , hardly matching the spectacular public accounts of his amours ... for all of Mr. Barrymore 's shenanigans and devastating wit , *The Great Profile* is more than a little pathetic . In the *Winter of his Discontent* Mr. Barrymore is selling his talent at cut @-@ rate " . In terms of his reputation , worse was to come in his final film , *Playmates* (1941) , which " amply illustrated the depths to which he had fallen ; he played an alcoholic Shakespearean ham named John Barrymore " .

In October 1940 , Barrymore returned to the NBC Radio network to work on Rudy Vallée 's show , now called the *Sealtest Show* . Barrymore recorded 74 episodes of the program , continuing in the vein of self @-@ parody , with jokes about his drinking , declining career and marital issues . On May 19 , 1942 , while recording a line from *Romeo and Juliet* for the show , Barrymore collapsed . He was taken to the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital and died there on May 29 , from cirrhosis of the liver and kidney failure , complicated by pneumonia . Shortly before his death , Barrymore returned to the faith of the Catholic Church . Although Errol Flynn 's memoirs claim that the film director Raoul Walsh " borrowed " Barrymore 's body before burial to leave his corpse propped in a chair for a drunken Flynn to discover when he returned home , Gene Fowler , a close friend of Barrymore , stayed with the body all night and denies the story . Barrymore was buried at Calvary Cemetery in Los Angeles on June 2 . In 1980 , Barrymore 's son had his father 's body reinterred at Philadelphia 's Mount Vernon Cemetery .

= = Legacy = =

The *New York Times* obituary stated that during the period when Barrymore 's performed in *Justice* , *Richard III* and *Hamlet* , the actor " was accepted by most critics as the foremost English @-@ speaking actor of his time ... equipped both by nature and by art . " The *Washington Post* agreed , noting that during his stage triumphs and early years in film , " he was the great profile , the darling

of the ' royal family ' of the stage . " Many of the obituaries made the point that Barrymore fell short of his potential . The Manchester Guardian thought that he " might with some self @-@ discipline have added his name to the list of truly great actors ... yet he dissipated his energies " . The New York Times noted that he could twist his abilities " to parody , burlesque himself and play the clown " , and they considered that it was " unfortunate that the public in recent years saw him in ... [that] mood . It was a mood of careless abdication " . The Washington Post observed that " with the passing of the years ? and as his private life became more public ? he became , despite his genius in the theater , a tabloid character . "

According to Morrison , Barrymore 's stage portrayals of Richard III and Hamlet were a model for modern performances of these roles . His interpretation along psychological lines was innovative , and his " dynamic portrayals ... changed the direction of subsequent revivals . " Barrymore 's natural acting style reversed the stage conventions of the time ; his " ' colloquial ' verse speaking introduced to the stage the vocal manner of a postwar gentleman . "

Barrymore was honored on few occasions by the entertainment industry and its members . Although both his brother and sister won Academy Awards , the only award Barrymore ever received for his screen work was from Rudolph Valentino in 1925 for Beau Brummel . Valentino created an award in his own name and felt that his fellow actors should receive accolades for their screen work . When Barrymore attended his ceremony at Grauman 's Chinese Theatre in 1940 , he left more than the customary hand and footprints in the theater 's forecourt : aided by the owner , Sid Grauman , Barrymore left a cement imprint of his facial profile . In February 1960 , for his contribution to the motion picture industry , Barrymore was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame , with a star at 6667 Hollywood Boulevard ; Barrymore , along with his two siblings , is included in the American Theater Hall of Fame . The Barrymore " Royal Family " of actors continued through two of his children ? his son with Costello , John Drew Barrymore and his daughter with Oelrichs , Diana ? both of whom became actors , as did John Jr . ' s daughter Drew . Barrymore 's brother Lionel died on November 15 , 1954 , and their sister Ethel died on June 18 , 1959 .

Barrymore 's achievements and his colorful life have ensured that several biographical studies followed his 1926 autobiography , Confessions of an Actor . Alma Power @-@ Waters produced a 1941 study , authorized by the subject , John Barrymore : The Legend and the Man ; Fowler , wrote Good Night , Sweet Prince : The Life and Times of John Barrymore (1943) ; Alpert published The Barrymores (1964) ; and John Kobler wrote Damned in Paradise : The Life of John Barrymore (1977) , although Norden noted in 2000 that many of these earlier works are less than reliable . Those he identified as being more thoroughly researched are Peters ' 1990 history , The House of Barrymore , and his own study of the actor 's work in John Barrymore : A Bio @-@ Bibliography (1995) . Subsequent to Norden 's comments on the available literature , Morrison published the positively reviewed John Barrymore , Shakespearean Actor in 1997 , which focuses on Barrymore 's stage work .

There were several celebratory events in 1982 , on the centenary of Barrymore 's birth . The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Museum of Modern Art jointly hosted a commemorative program of his work , which included numerous excerpts from his films and interviews with some who knew him , including Barrie and his one @-@ time co @-@ star Myrna Loy . The same year , in celebration of the centenary of the Actors Fund of America , the US Postal Service issued a postage stamp featuring Barrymore and his siblings . In February 2010 , an intersection in Fort Lee , New Jersey , was renamed John Barrymore Way on what would have been the actor 's 128th birthday . The intersection marked the spot of the former Buckheister 's Hotel , where Barrymore had his 1900 stage debut in " A Man of the World " .

= = Portrayals and characterizations = =

Barrymore has been used as the inspiration for characters on stage and film . He performed as himself in a number of works (including The Great Profile , My Dear Children and Playmates) , and in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1921 he was played by his friend W. C. Fields . In 1927 the Barrymore family was parodied in The Royal Family in which a character based on him was portrayed by

Fredric March , whose performance Barrymore admired . The play was staged in London in 1934 as Theatre Royal , with Laurence Olivier in the Barrymore role , and adapted as a film in 1930 , with March reprising his performance .

In 1991 , Paul Rudnick 's comedy I Hate Hamlet , performed at the Walter Kerr Theatre , was set in Barrymore 's former apartment . He returns after a séance , dressed in his Hamlet costume . Nicol Williamson played the Barrymore role . Three years later , a London production , Jack : A Night on the Town with John Barrymore , ran for 60 performances at the Criterion Theatre , and Williamson again played the lead . Barrymore , a two @-@ person play by William Luce , premiered in 1996 and depicts Barrymore shortly before his death in 1942 as he is rehearsing a revival of his Richard III . Christopher Plummer played the title role . A film version was released in 2012 , with Plummer again taking the main role .

Barrymore had been a friend and drinking companion of Fields . In the 1976 film W.C. Fields and Me , Barrymore was played by Jack Cassidy . Barrymore 's friend , Errol Flynn , played him in a 1958 film Too Much , Too Soon , an adaptation of the autobiography of Diana Barrymore , with Dorothy Malone playing the female lead . Howard Thompson , the film critic of The New York Times , wrote that " Flynn , as the late John Barrymore , a moody , wild @-@ drinking ruin of a great actor , steals the picture , lock , stock and keg . It is only in the scenes of his savage disintegration , as the horrified girl hangs on , that the picture approaches real tragedy . "