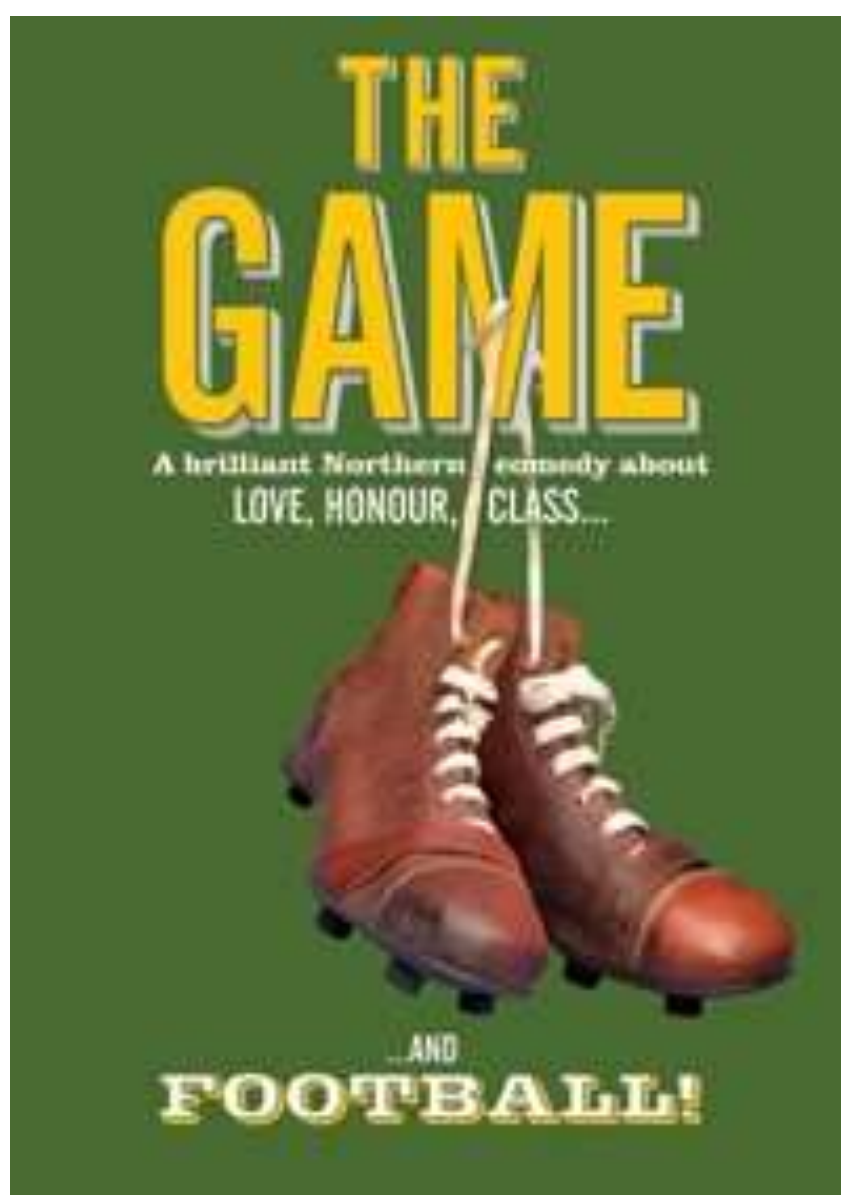




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# NORTHERN BROADSIDES

*Information and Education Pack*



The educational content of this pack is intended for students at Key Stage 4 and upwards.

## CONTENTS...

	Page
<b>DRAMA</b>	
The Play	3
• The Players	
• The Plot	
Our Production	7
• Barrie Rutter	
• Wendi Peters	
• Guy Parry	
STUDY:	<i>An alternative ending...</i>
<b>HISTORY</b>	
The world of The Game	13
• A brief history of Football	
STUDY:	<i>Jack Metherell, then and now</i>
<b>LITERATURE</b>	
Harold Brighouse	19
• Biography and works	
STUDY:	<i>From Whitworth to Hobson</i> <i>Strong Northern Women</i>
<b>Credits and Links</b>	23



## The Play:

## The Game by Harold Brighouse

*A Comedy in three Acts*

The action of the play takes place in a Lancashire town on the last Saturday in April between the hours of one and five in the afternoon, in the year 1913.

## The Players:

Austin Whitworth	<i>Businessman and owner of Blackton Rovers Football Club</i>
Edmund Whitworth	<i>His brother (A London Solicitor)</i>
Leo Whitworth	<i>His son (An aspiring poet)</i>
Elsie Whitworth	<i>His daughter (A football fan)</i>
Florence Whitworth	<i>His daughter (A football fan)</i>
Jack Metherell	<i>A footballer (Centre forward)</i>
Mrs Metherell	<i>His mother</i>
Hugh Martin	<i>Blackton Rovers Club Secretary</i>
Dr Wells	<i>Team Physio</i>
Barnes	<i>The Whitworth's butler.</i>
Mrs Wilmot	<i>A neighbour of Mrs Metherell</i>

# The Plot:

## ACT ONE

Home of the  
Whitworth family



*Production model. Design by Laura Clarkson*

Edmund Whitworth is visiting his brother Austin, a wealthy businessman and owner of Blackton Rovers – a once thriving football club. It's the last day of the season and Austin's daughters, Florence and Elsie, eagerly await another caller – Rovers' star player Jack Metherell – though their artistic brother Leo is less enthusiastic.

When they discover that their father has sold Jack to today's opposition, Birchester United, the two girls are perplexed and furious; if Blackton Rovers lose to Birchester, they face relegation to the 2<sup>nd</sup> division. Austin explains to his brother that he has been forced into making the transfer, as the club is in serious financial trouble. Austin had invested a great deal of his personal fortune in Blackton Rovers, and if they are relegated he faces financial ruin.

Despite the fact that he's playing for the opposition, Jack Metherell arrives to meet with Austin, but first encounters Elsie. They are in love; though it's clear that Elsie is dazzled by Jack's handsome physique and football skills, while he has his mind on higher things. Nevertheless, they agree that Jack's transfer means they'll have to get married sooner rather than later.

Austin's purpose in inviting Jack to the house is to ask him to throw the match that day, for the sake of his old club. Jack is man of conscience and refuses to do it, for the club or for money. Nevertheless, he then goes on to say that he wishes to marry Elsie. Austin is flabbergasted at his audacity but the forthright and impetuous Elsie refuses to take no for an answer. She goes with Jack to the match believing the marriage a done deal.

## **ACT TWO**

Office of Blackton  
Rovers FC



*Production model. Design by Laura Clarkson*

The match is underway and Blackton (playing rough) have promisingly scored a goal in the first 5 minutes. Austin is so tense he can't bring himself to watch. He tries to talk to Club Secretary, Hugh Martin, about the depth of Blackton's financial trouble, but Martin is only interested in the game. Team physio, Dr Wells, advises Austin to have a drink.

Edmund isn't that interested in football and joins Austin in the office to berate him for his lack of authority over his daughters – particularly Elsie. He thinks that marrying a footballer would be beneath her and offers to take her to London to cure her infatuation in the theatres and the shops.

On the field, the game has been stopped due to an injury. Jack has broken his arm, and Elsie is furious at not being permitted to nurse him. In a hot exchange with her father and uncle she affirms her determination to marry Jack.

Jack comes into the office on his way home, his arm in a sling. Tactlessly, Austin implies that Jack has broken his arm on purpose to smooth the way for him and Elsie. Jack refutes this accusation.

On the field, Birchester have scored – it's now one all. Everyone goes to watch the end of the first half, leaving Jack and Elsie alone. Elsie is persuaded that Jack didn't break his arm on purpose, but insists that it suits them to let her father think he did. Jack won't countenance even being thought dishonest. He decides it's time to take Elsie home to meet his mother.

Half time. Austin returns, Blackton have scored again and are now a goal up at 2:1. Jack's injury has saved the day for him. The lovers return, as they can't get any taxis to take Jack now he's transferred. Jack is furious, as he never wanted to move in the first place. Austin smugly presses his conviction that Jack has thrown the match on purpose. This riles Jack still further to the point where he decides to go back on the field and win the match for Birchester United. Nevertheless Austin believes the match is theirs – he's bribed the referee.

## **ACT THREE**

### **Mrs Methereell's Parlour**



*Production model. Design by Laura Clarkson*

Jack's mother Mrs Methereell is having afternoon tea with her neighbour, Mrs Wilmot, when Elsie arrives, chaperoned by her uncle Edmund. The game is still on, but news of Jack's injury has already made an early edition of the local paper. Elsie and Edmund inform his mother that Jack has gone back on the field with a broken arm. Elsie demands to see if Jack's room is prepared for his recovery. Mrs Methereell tries to stop her but Elsie is determined, leaving it to Edmund to drop the bombshell that she and Jack are engaged to be married.

Despite her surprise, and Elsie's rudeness, Mrs Methereell takes the news calmly and handles Edmund's snobbishness beautifully. She's firm, but fair-minded and ready to give Elsie a chance – though she'll have to learn to do without servants and bathrooms if she's to marry Jack.

Jack arrives home, having won the match for Birchester United. Realising what this means for his brother, Edmund leaves to be with him. Elsie stays with Jack to tell him that their engagement is all right with his mother. The relief of having his mother's blessing, and the adrenalin still pumping through his veins bring out a rough passion in Jack that's a little too brutal for Elsie. She repels his coarse kisses and the mood between them alters – particularly when he discovers that Elsie plans to usurp his mother's position in the house.

Mrs Methereell enters from the kitchen to take control and when Austin arrives on the scene she attacks him for transferring Jack and making him unpopular in the town. Austin is a ruined and humbled man. He apologises to Jack for asking him to cheat, and offers reparation by way of his wholehearted blessing on the marriage.

However, Elsie isn't so sure. Seeing Jack's home life has shown her a different side to her future husband – and she's not prepared to play second fiddle to his mother. She asks Jack to choose between her and his mother. Consequently – the wedding is off.

Edmund arrives with a bundle of offers: he'll bail Austin out; present Leo with his articles in the law; and take Elsie to London for the cure. Jack asks if he might study the law also, but Edmund tells him he has too good a conscience to make a lawyer. The Whitworths leave and Jack and his mother sit down to tea



Costume design by Laura Clarkson

## Our Production

The signature of Northern Broadsides Theatre Company is a direct, narrative style, with close attention to rhythm and the clarity of text.

This approach has won the company acclaim for its vibrant and accessible productions of verse classics by Shakespeare and the Greeks – but the more naturalistic northern cadences of Brighouse’s writing are also ideally suited to the methods of Artistic Director, Barrie Rutter.

Barrie says:

***I heard about THE GAME a few years ago. It had fallen into such obscurity that even play publishers Samuel French didn’t have a copy. We eventually tracked down the script in a Canadian university library.***



♥ Nobby Clark

***It was a revelation. It’s very funny, but also heartrending with a real Chekhovian, bittersweet ending. We planned to stage it in the last World Cup year, 2006, but couldn’t find it a slot. So we weren’t going to let this World Cup year go by without a revival. This play has too much to say about football and the drama around it.***

***Although Brighouse was from a comfortable background – his father was a manager in a cotton-spinning firm – his writing acknowledges***

*the honour and dignity of the working class, while pointing up the class divide. It's here that we see the biggest differences between then and now. In Brighouse's world, the greatest centre forward in the land still lives with his mother in the two-up two-down where he was born.*

*I grew up in a similar house in the fishing dock area of Hull which didn't have an inside tap till I was 11. Top footballers today are millionaires who drive to games in their Bugattis, but I remember when the Hull City goalkeeper Billy Bly owned a newsagent's 400 yards from the ground. On match days he'd be out selling the papers at 6am, stop for a cup of tea then walk over to play in the match.*

*Brighouse's women are always memorable. He was one of the Manchester School of writers, known for creating strong female roles; the forerunners of the classic Coronation Street characters.*

*Wendi Peters, who played Cilla in the Street, is relishing the role of Mrs Methereil.*

Wendi says:

*The woman I play, Mrs Methereil, she sort of reminds me of my Grandma Dawson: standing there on that front step, knowing everything that's going on in her street. My grandma worked down the cotton mills from being very young – 11 or 12.*



♥ Nobby Clark

*Mrs Methereil is very, very strong. She's the mother of the star football player Jack, and she obviously adores him, and really wants what's best for him. She doesn't want him marrying some woman who doesn't know how to clean the flags outside the front door properly, or keep a house – which Elsie has never learned to do because she's always had it done for her. She doesn't think this girl is good enough for him.*

*I haven't worked with Northern Broadsides before but I've been aware of their work from the beginning. Just after they set up in 1992 I was working at Hull Truck Theatre Company. They were the buzz of Hull Truck, so from the very start I knew what they were trying to achieve.*



*They try to bring classical drama to an audience that wouldn't necessarily go and see that sort of thing. They make it very different and easily understandable. Barrie is a man who knows exactly what he wants. I just love his love of what he does – making these marvelous plays accessible to everybody.*

## THE TEAM



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Back row, left to right: Phil Rowson, Jos Vantylar, Barrie Rutter, Roy North, Matt Sutton, John Branwell  
Front row, left to right: Catherine Kinsella, Wendi Peters, Jo Gerard, Liz Carney

Our company of actors are supported by a dedicated design and stage management team, led by Company Stage Manager, Guy Parry.

Guy has been with Northern Broadsides for several years – first as an actor, and now behind the scenes – and, as Company Stage Manager of THE GAME, Guy has a unique overview of the whole process of bringing the play from page to stage.



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Guy says:

***My job is to act as a kind of communications hub between all the different people involved in the production: the company management; the actors and their agents; crew and technicians; and the***

*many venues in which we perform. I'm a point of contact for everyone, and I am always on duty – even in the bar after the show.*

*I'm very lucky to be working for Northern Broadsides, as my role is not as limited as it might be in other companies. Consequently I'm involved in the process of production right from the moment that a play is chosen by our Artistic Director Barrie Rutter.*

*We have to set clear budgets for each production, covering design and costume; construction and lighting; publicity; and the weekly wages of cast and crew. It's part of my job to make sure that the show comes in on budget. Once we know what we need it's up to me to co-ordinate everything in preproduction and rehearsal, right up to opening night. Then it's my responsibility to maintain the clean running of the show, so that the last performance is as tight and technically sound as the first.*

*Having been an actor is a useful thing in the job I do now, as communication is very important. I'm also used to dealing with agents, and I understand the kinds of anxieties actors have and hopefully can anticipate worries before they arise. It's part of my job to deal with any problems that come up with cast, crew, management, venues... anybody really.*

*Every show presents unique challenges and THE GAME is no exception. It's incredibly prescient to the state of football at the moment. The dialogue is so fresh and relevant that I'm absolutely sure people will think we've adapted the script to include modern references.*

*At Northern Broadsides we often hold open rehearsals, where friends of the company can come in and watch our work in progress. When we had an open rehearsal of THE GAME, with the actors still reading from the script and no set or costumes, someone mentioned that we might need to make it clear in the final production that it's a period piece and set in 1913.*

*This presents a particular problem for me that is a real joy to tackle. The placing of the show has to be specific – so this means trying to find furniture, props and costumes that are all (or*

*appear to be) authentic. We've had to source authentic football boots, newspapers and footballs; thank God for ebay!*

*I honestly couldn't tell you the thing I like best about my job – its all good. I suppose I would say that it's a great feeling when a production all comes together on opening night, and I've been with that show all the way from the very first planning meeting.*



## Suggestions for study: DRAMA

An alternative ending...

At the end of THE GAME Jack Metherell chooses his mother over Elsie, but what would happen if he made a different choice?

Here are the lines from the play:

Elsie: It rests with Jack to choose.

Jack: To choose?

Elsie: Yes. Me or your mother. Which is it to be?

Jack: I I don't know.

Mrs M: You'd better know, and sharp.

Jack: She's my mother, Elsie.

Elsie: Yes. Who comes first?

Using these lines as a springboard, improvise the rest of the scene; one in which Jack decides to leave his mother and go with Elsie instead.

How does this alter the end of the play?

How do the other characters react?

Does this make a happier ending? Or not?

Consider the sequel to this ending of THE GAME.

How do Jack and Elsie fare as a married couple?

The play is set in 1913, just a year before the First World War. What happens when the war comes?

**If Jack is called up, Elsie and Mrs Methrell**  
might be thrown back together...

Using improvisation, work around the dramatic possibilities thrown up by these questions.



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# HISTORY...

## A Brief History of Football

### 1100 - 1200



First written account of the playing of football in England by a clerk named William FitzStephen. In his *Description of London* FitzStephen writes a few lines about a 'ball game', played by the youth out on the fields and watched by the fathers and elders of the city.

### 1200 - 1300

- ◆ A game which came to be known as Mob Football is widely played, with virtually no rules, any number of players and two goals set any distance apart. Games were traditionally played at Shrovetide.
- ◆ Several cases are recorded cases of players dying after wounding themselves on their own, or someone else's, dagger.
- ◆ In Ashbourne, Derbyshire, a game of Mob Football is still played every Shrove Tuesday to this day.



## 1300 - 1400

- ◆ In 1314 King Edward II issues a ban in London, on pain of imprisonment, of the *hustling over large balls, from which many evils may arise*.
- ◆ Edward III laments that the youth are more interested in playing football than practicing archery and reinstates the ban – as he plans to invade Scotland.
- ◆ 1388 – Henry IV tries, unsuccessfully, to ban football – with fines and imprisonment as punishments.

## 1400 - 1500



- ◆ Henry V orders men to practise archery rather than football. The following year Henry's Archers play a vital role in the victory at Agincourt.
- ◆ 1424 – The Football Act is passed by the Parliament of Scotland under James I; any man caught playing the game *fut ball* would be fined 4pence.
- ◆ Yorkist King Edward IV outlaws all kinds of games: dice, quoits and... you've guessed it – football.
- ◆ The first Tudor, Henry VII, follows many of his predecessors in banning the game in public places.

## 1500 - 1600

- ◆ Henry VIII orders the first pair of custom made football boots, but still introduces laws against playing the game in public spaces.

- ◆ Religious leaders come out against football; including Puritan preacher, Sir Thomas Elyot, who writes that it is little more than *bestly fury and extreme violence*.
- ◆ Football is defended by writer and educationalist Richard Mulcaster, as it develops strength and fitness. He even claims it's good for the bowels!

## 1600 - 1700

- ◆ Oliver Cromwell takes a dim view of virtually everything the rest of us would regard as fun, and is very successful in enforcing laws against all kinds of sport and recreation. He decrees that boys caught playing football on Sunday should be whipped.
- ◆ Following the death of Cromwell and the restoration of Charles II, football begins to re-emerge.
- ◆ It's important to point out that variations of the game football are also being played all over Europe.



## 1700 - 1800

- ◆ Football is now being played in most of Britain's leading public schools, including Eton and Harrow.
- ◆ There are still no consistent rules for the game – so they can't play against each other.



## 1800 - 1900

- ◆ 1848 – a meeting is held at Cambridge University between representatives of the leading public schools. Their mission – to establish a consistent code for the playing of football. Hence *The Cambridge Rules* were established.

- ◆ 1857 – a football club is founded at Bramall Lane in Sheffield; believed to be the first football club in the world.



- ◆ *The Cambridge Rules* continue to evolve. Innovations include: the specification of 11-a-side; introduction of an independent referee; an off-side rule.
- ◆ 1863 – The Football Association is founded.

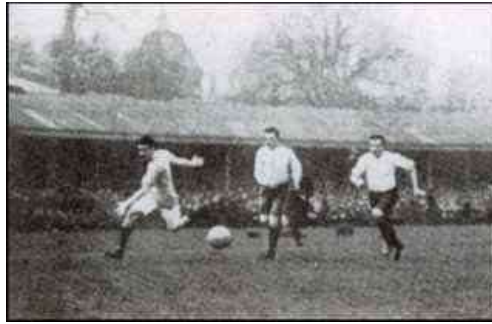


- ◆ 1872 – first FA Challenge Cup is played; though, at this stage, without crossbars or goalnets.
  - ◆ **1882 – Harold Brighthouse born.**
  - ◆ 1885 – following disputes over the paying of players, the FA announces that, in the interests of football, it will legalise the employment of professional players.
- ◆ 1891 – Referee moved from the touchline to the field of play to take complete control of the game. Many amateurs are scandalized by the implication that gentlemen footballers might be capable of cheating!
- ◆ It's expensive to attend a football match – 6d, compared with just 3d to go to the Music Hall. (The theatre is still generally cheaper than a premiership ticket).



1900 ---

- ◆ 1905 – FA commission appointed to investigate Manchester City captain, Billy Meredith, over the alleged attempted bribery of an Aston Villa player to throw a match.



*Billy Meredith passing two Bolton Wanderers defenders in the FA Cup Final – 1904*

- ◆ **1913 – THE GAME by Harold Brighouse opens at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre.**
- ◆ 1966 – England win the World Cup.
- ◆ You know the rest...



## Suggestions for study: HISTORY

Jack Metherell – then and now.

Research the lives of early professional players in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Who were they?

What teams did they play for?

Was football their only job?

How much did they earn?

What rules applied to the paying of players?

Compare the lives of these men with professional footballers of today.

How do they differ?  
Have things improved?  
Are players better today?

Consider the game of football.

Is the game affected by how players are paid?  
If so, how?  
How do these historical changes affect the fans?



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# LITERATURE...

## The life and works of Harold Brighouse (1882 – 1958)

Brighouse was born in Eccles, Lancashire, in the year that crossbars were introduced into the game of football. He was the first child of John Southworth Brighouse, a manager in a cotton-spinning firm, and Charlotte Amelia née Harrison. He attended a local school, but won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School.

Harold's literary talents and ambition may well have been inherited from his mother, who had been a headmistress, but when he left school at 17, he naturally gravitated towards the textile trade of his father and began work as a buyer for a shipping merchant.

In 1902 his firm was expanding and Harold left the North to set up their new London office. Though he clearly nurtured aspirations to be a writer, his time in London wasn't entirely wasted as it was here that Harold met his future wife, Emily. Shortly after they were married in 1907 Harold was promoted at work and the newlyweds returned to Manchester. However, Harold left the firm in 1908 to become a full time writer.

Harold's return to Manchester fortuitously coincided with the renovation and reopening of the Gaiety Theatre, by the visionary theatre manager, Annie Horniman. Between them, Horniman and her director Ben Iden Payne developed the Gaiety as the first regional repertory theatre in Britain, producing classic plays by Shakespeare and the Greeks. They also encouraged and developed local writers, who formed what came to be known as the Manchester School.

Luminaries of this new Northern, dramatic voice included Harold Brighouse, whose second play *The Doorway* was produced at the Gaiety Theatre in 1909.

Auditorium of The Gaiety Theatre Manchester --- demolished 1957



Born and bred in the football-obsessed culture of industrial Lancashire, it seems only natural that Brighouse would turn at some point to football as fertile ground for his unsentimental working class dramas and in 1913 *The Game* premiered at the Liverpool Repertory Theatre. By this time Brighouse was clearly maturing as a playwright. His acknowledged masterpiece *Hobson's Choice* was written just two years later and first produced in New York, directed by Ben Iden Payne.

The Great War brought many changes for Brighouse, as it did for everyone. He was declared unfit for combat, and seconded to the Air Ministry Intelligence Staff, where he wrote *Hobson's Choice* in his spare time. After the war Brighouse moved to London, where he continued to write novels, plays, reviews and pieces for the Manchester Guardian.

Though Brighouse wrote no more full length plays after 1931, it is as a dramatist that he is best remembered. In 1953, *Hobson's Choice* was made into a successful film, directed by David Lean and starring Charles Laughton. In the same year Brighouse published his autobiography, *What I have had*.

In 1958, two days before his 76<sup>th</sup> birthday, Harold Brighouse collapsed in the Strand and was taken to Charing Cross Hospital, where he died the following day.



Costume design by Laura Clarkson

## Suggestions for study: LITERATURE

### From Whitworth to Hobson

Consider how the characters in THE GAME prefigure those in HOBSON'S CHOICE.

In what way is Austin Whitworth similar to Henry Horatio Hobson?

His age; status; wealth.

His relationship with his children.

His predicament.

The outcome of his story.

In what ways does Whitworth differ from Hobson?

Examine Brighouse's themes in relation to the two plays; how do they compare?

Themes of class; sex; marriage; the generation gap; human frailty.



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### Strong Northern Women

The playwrights of the Manchester School of Dramatists were noted for their depictions of strong northern women, and Brighouse is no exception.

Examine the female characters in *THE GAME*.

To what extent do they contradict our classic idea of Edwardian ladies?

Are they genuinely powerful?

How great is their sphere of influence?

What are their expectations in life?

How far are these expectations linked to their class?

Trace a line from *Brighouse* to today's popular dramas on television. What has changed/remained the same in the depiction of Northern Women in drama.



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## **Credits and links**

Photos: Nobby Clark  
Design: Laura Clarkson

Information and additional images sourced at:

<http://www.wildyorkshire.co.uk>

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk>

<http://en.wikipedia.org>

<http://www.sheffieldfc.com>

<http://www.thefa.com>

<http://www.nationalfootballmuseum>

<http://www.india-karnataka.info>

<http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/ManchesterTheatres/GaietyTheatreManchester.htm>

Information and education pack written and compiled by  
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