

D. H. SOUTER

David H. Souter came to Australia in 1886 and eventually joined the *Bulletin* magazine as an illustrator. His involvement with the theatre came about in the early 1900s when he collaborated on several operettas, F. Wynne-Jones's *The Grey Kimona* and Alfred Hill's *Tapu*. His association with Hill continued into the 1910s through their involvement with the Repertory Theatre Society (Sydney) and in 1914 he also tried his hand at playwriting, producing two plays that year for the society. Three years later he wrote the libretto to Hill's romantic opera, *The Rajah of Shivapore*.

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland on 30 March 1862, David Henry Souter developed by age 12 a preference for "drawing and reading" over "anything like hard work" and left school early to take up an apprenticeship with a housepainter and signwriter. It was also at this time that he attended the South Kensington Art School (Aberdeen Branch). Travelling to Natal, South Africa, in 1881, he later moved to Port Elizabeth where he continued signwriting and then took up a position in "illustrated journalism." Following his marriage in 1886, Souter and his wife journeyed to Australia, spending six months in Melbourne before relocating to Sydney in 1887. Eventually joining the *Bulletin* staff as an illustrator, Souter established a long-term association with this iconic publication. In the course of his career, he achieved the distinction of having "at least one cartoon published in every edition" of the *Bulletin* for a forty-year period, beginning in 1895.

Souter's "graceful pen-work showed the early influence [of the] sinuous and flowing" style of Art Nouveau. "The drawings were strong on the printed page with large black solid areas complementing fine, firm pen lines" (Holden, n. pag.) These bold compositions were strengthened by "the inclusion of the familiar Souter cat" which frequently accompanied his depiction of chic and fashionable women. A number of his cat studies appear in *Bush-Babs* (1933), a selected work of poems that was originally written by Souter to entertain his children. The Souter cat was also "featured on Royal Doulton chinaware" produced in 1906.¹

Noted as an early poster artist and bookplate designer, Souter illustrated several children's books, including five titles by Ethel Turner. While best known for his work as a black-and-white illustrator, he also wrote plays and composed libretti for operettas such as *The Grey Kimona* (1902). His experience in the field of publishing included twelve years with the John Sands company and then a subsequent period spent as manager of the art department for William Brooks. His activities while with William Brooks incorporated the role of art editor for "The New Australian School Series" of readers, produced by that publisher during the early 1900s. He also provided illustrations for several books, including Robert Francis Irvine's *Bubbles His Book* (ca. 1900). Between 1904 to 1911, Souter was co-editor of the prestigious *Art and Architecture* journal and he later held the position of literary editor of *Country Life and Stock and Station Journal* from 1928.

During the early 1900s Souter also became involved in writing for the theatre. One of his earliest efforts was the libretto for F. Wynne Jones' operetta *The Grey Kimona* (1902).² The following year Souter was commissioned by J. C. Williamson to re-work Arthur H. Adams' libretto for Alfred Hill's romantic opera *Tapu*. Although the rights to the opera had been obtained by Williamson several years previous he did not stage the work himself until 1904, and then only after Adams had resigned from his position as his literary secretary. While the Hill/Adam's version had been staged by the Pollard Opera Company in New Zealand in 1903 (and again in Hobart that same year), Williamson's direction to Souter was to rewrite some parts, and especially a number of scenes containing political and satirical comment.³ When Adams found out he was so angered that he wrote a series of damning articles about Williamson in *The Lone Hand* and the *Theatre* magazine. The year after *Tapu* premiered for Williamson, Souter again collaborated with Hill, adding additional material to J. Youlin Birch's libretto for *A Moorish Maid* (1905).

Sydney Morning Herald 13 Sept. (1913), 2.

¹ For a concise overview of cartoons featuring the trademark Souter feline, see Robert Holden's *Souter's Cats* (1988).

² Although written in 1902 the work remained unproduced until 1907 when Clyde Meynell and John Gunn staged it in Adelaide. It was also produced by the Pollard Opera Company in 1909.

³ Although Williamson claimed part-credit for the new version of *Tapu*, neither Souter's nor Royle's names were included in the advertised credits.

Souter's association with Hill continued into the 1910s through their involvement with the Repertory Theatre Society (Syd). In 1914 he tried his hand at playwriting, producing two plays that year for the society, and three years later wrote the libretto to Hill's romantic opera, *The Rajah of Shivapore* (1917). According to Vane Lindesay, Souter also contributed a libretto at least another four operas and/or operettas.

Souter died at his Bondi home on 22 September 1935 and was survived by three daughters and two sons. He was cremated with Presbyterian forms.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

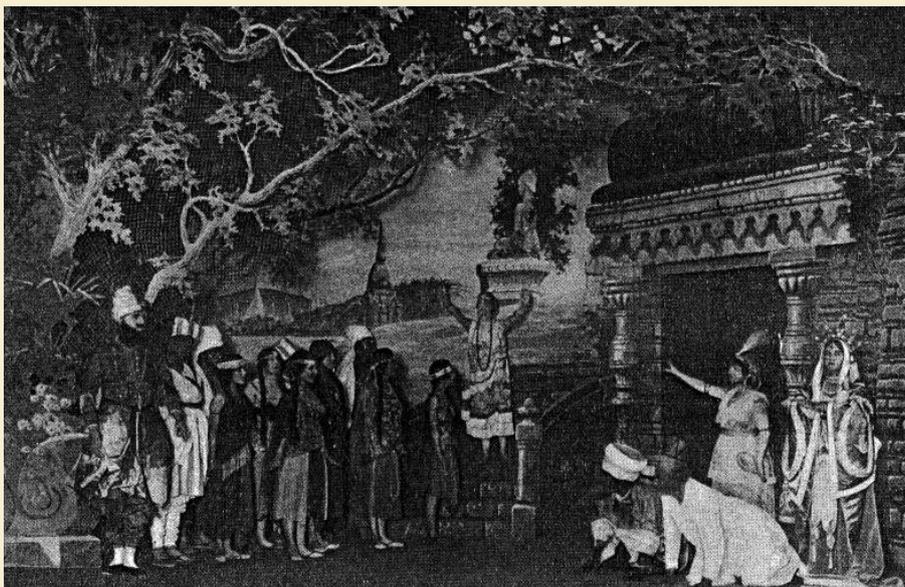
1. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (1994) notes that D. H. Souter has sometimes been mistakenly believed to be related to the poet C. H. Souter.
2. The State Library of Victoria holds the following manuscript: "His Book, Being a Scrapbook of Souter's Cartoons" [ca.1880-ca.1935]. Comprising material "mainly from the *Bulletin* and including four cartoons in Souter's style with annotations by Souter; three portrait photographs, one of which is autographed; a self-portrait, an autograph; and an original design on the front cover."

FURTHER REFERENCE

Taylor, Amanda. "[Souter, D.H.](#)" *AustLit* (2008).

Lindesay, Vane. "[Souter, David Henry \(1862-1935\)](#)" ABD: Vol 12 (1990).

Stephens, A. G. (ed.) "Australian Autobiographies." Vol.2 (n. yr.).



"A Scene in the *Rajah of Shivapore* at the Playhouse."

Green Room Jan. (1918), 5.

Last updated: 20/08/2011

Expanded and Updated from Amanda Taylor's 2008 AustLit entry

NB: The URL for this PDF will change each time it is updated. If you wish to cite or link to this record please use the following:

Australian Variety Theatre Archive • <http://ozvta.com/practitioners-other-m-z/>