

J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*  
In and Out of Time

A Children's Classic at 100

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CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION  
CENTENNIAL STUDIES SERIES, NO. 4



THE SCARECROW PRESS, INC.  
*Lanham, Maryland • Toronto • Oxford*  
2006

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# Introduction

*Donna R. White and C. Anita Tarr*

## THE PARADOX OF *PETER PAN*

J. M. Barrie's literary reputation rests on one work: *Peter Pan*, the play, first performed in 1904 to wildly enthusiastic audiences and still performed successfully today. The character of Peter Pan, the boy who would not grow up, has become iconic in popular culture as well as in children's literature. Peter's story has survived charges of sentimentality to emerge periodically but predictably in every generation to renewed impact. We celebrate the centenary of *Peter Pan* with this book: a collection of essays devoted to *Peter Pan* as a work that brought together various strains of influences during Barrie's own time; a work that still confounds readers in its narrative complexity; and a work that, simply, refuses to die but keeps on ticking through our cultural changes to underlie our ideologies about children and the literature we provide for them. Peter Pan is immortal.

By the time Barrie wrote *Peter Pan* (and rewrote and rewrote it until the published iteration of 1928), he was already a highly successful novelist and playwright, as well known for his eccentricities as for his fanciful stage productions.<sup>1</sup> Alone of all of Barrie's literary works, *Peter Pan* remains vital today because it speaks nostalgically about our wishes to keep children young, while reminding us mercilessly about how cruel childhood can really be. Neverland is never innocent, nor is it heaven or hell, nor reward or punishment, but rather an imaginary

place individual to each child, reeking with desires for safety and home as strong as those that lured each child away from home in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Neverland is never just one idea, just as Peter Pan is never just one boy or girl, but betwixt and between, and just as *Peter Pan* is not only a play for children but also one for adults, indulgently sentimental, joyful and tragic, about a dead boy who never dies.

*Peter Pan* is mired in the times of its creation, but it is also timeless. It is outside of time even as it follows us all with a ticking clock. Our deaths are simultaneously imminent and escapable. We cannot completely comprehend *Peter Pan*, but we always remember it. We are Peter Pan; we are Wendy. We are, hopefully, an open window to our imaginations.

### PETER PAN AND THE PANTOMIME TRADITION

Anyone who has ever tried to write about Peter Pan has quickly discovered the protean nature of the subject. What are we to make of a boy who can fly without the benefit of wings—except when he forgets he knows *how* to fly? A boy with an extremely limited short-term memory and no long-term memory at all who nevertheless remembers running away from home when he was only one day old? A boy who successfully refuses to grow up but sometimes seems to be a baby, sometimes a pre-teen, and occasionally a god? When the dastardly Captain Hook asks the direct question, “Pan, who and what are thou?” Peter replies, “I’m youth, I’m joy . . . I’m a little bird that has broken out of the egg” (*Peter and Wendy* 188). As a definition, Peter’s response leaves much to be desired. It sounds remarkably similar to playwright James Barrie’s response when Nina Boucicault, the first actress to play Peter Pan, asked for some insight into her character. All Barrie would say was, “Peter is a bird . . . and he is one day old” (qtd. in Hanson 36).

The text is just as amorphous as its main character. Is it a novel or a play? If a novel, which one? As for the play, in *The Road to the Never Land*, R. D. S. Jack identifies more than twenty variants written by Barrie, who, incidentally, often claimed that he was *not* the author of *Peter Pan* and had no clear idea who was. There is no definitive text of *Peter Pan*, but there *is* a textual history. The first appearance in print of a character called Peter Pan occurred in 1902 in a novel Barrie wrote for adults, *The Little White Bird*. The book recounts the friendship between the narrator and a poor but well-born young couple and their

son. Over the course of several chapters, the narrator tells the boy, David, a story about a one-week-old baby who flies out of his nursery to return to the island of the birds—a baby named Peter Pan. The author's whimsical notion is that all babies were once birds; that is why there are bars on nursery windows—to keep the babies from flying away if they forget they are no longer birds. In *The Little White Bird*, the infant Peter Pan has many adventures in Kensington Gardens, where he lives among the birds and the fairies, apparently forever.

Barrie himself claimed that an earlier work was really the basis for Peter Pan: a privately published photograph album with fictional commentary called *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island*, which Barrie had printed in 1901. Only two copies of this volume were printed, and one was immediately lost on a train. This album recounted the imaginary adventures of three young friends of Barrie: George, Jack, and Peter Llewelyn Davies. The boys acted out the adventures as Barrie directed them. Barrie portrayed Captain Swarthy, a villain similar to Captain Hook. Although some of the adventures in the album influenced the later play, the character Peter Pan does not make an appearance. *The Boy Castaways* is really what we might call an Ur-text, only tangentially related to the textual history of Peter Pan. However, the Llewelyn Davies boys were vitally involved in the creation of Peter Pan since the stories that appeared in *The Little White Bird* had originally been told to George and Jack, and the infant Peter Pan was at first their baby brother Peter.

In 1904, two years after *The Little White Bird*, the play entitled *Peter Pan* was first produced in London. But Barrie, a well-known playwright by then, was a hands-on writer, and the production the audience saw on opening night was considerably different from the handwritten manuscript conserved at the Lilly Library in Indiana. And the play seen by another audience four nights later contained two additional scenes. Barrie constantly rewrote the play during rehearsals and even during the run of the play that first year. Each year thereafter until his death in 1937, a new production was mounted every Christmas and Barrie tinkered with the text some more.

The next item in our textual history was published as a children's book, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, in 1906. This, however, consisted only of the Peter Pan chapters from *The Little White Bird*. The main attraction of the book was the addition of illustrations by the famous Arthur Rackham. A novelized version of the play appeared in 1911 with the title *Peter and Wendy*. It is considerably different from

the play, although the structure of the adventures remains the same. Barrie elaborates on characterization, adds numerous scenes, and provides much authorial commentary. This is the book most people think of as *Peter Pan*. The title *Peter and Wendy* was changed to *Peter Pan and Wendy* in 1924 and later became simply *Peter Pan*, thus usurping the title of the play and causing great confusion for scholars and bibliographers.

Finally, in 1928, Barrie published the play itself—or at least, one version of it. This too was titled *Peter Pan*. The textual history makes it difficult to know what scholars are talking about when the subject is Peter Pan. The editors of this volume do not propose to make things any easier. We have another answer to Captain Hook's question, "Pan, who and what are thou?" We say *Peter Pan* is a pantomime. The *Peter Pan* we are referring to at this point is the play produced in 1904 and every year thereafter. However, we are not the first to call it a pantomime. Barrie himself said he was writing a pantomime. Contemporary audiences and theater critics knew it was a pantomime. As late as 1937, George Bernard Shaw referred to it as a pantomime (qtd. in Mander 44). More recent literary critics, however, particularly American ones, do not know this, and would not be much enlightened if they did, because they would not know what a pantomime is.

Pantomime is a peculiar British phenomenon, with the accent on peculiar. It is a form of popular entertainment produced at Christmas time, featuring stock characters, standard plots, and extravagant sets and stage effects. To quote from one history of pantomime,

It takes its name from classical times and changes the meaning, its characters from Italian comedy and changes their names, its stories from continental fairy tales and mixes historical figures, then adds every conceivable trick and resource of the theatre, opera, ballet, music hall and musical comedy. It has moulded all these elements together over the past three hundred years into something which no-one but the English understand, or even want! (Mander 1)

By Barrie's time, pantomime had become a Christmas extravaganza for children, but it certainly did not start out that way. During the first decade of the eighteenth century, the traditional Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* characters were introduced to English audiences by acting troupes from France that performed in English theaters and at fairs. In 1716 an enterprising London theater manager, John Rich, who was also an actor and a gifted mime, started adding a silent pantomime based

on the Italian characters to the end of an evening's double bill. On the English stage, the most popular of these characters became known as Harlequin and Columbine, the lovers; Pierrot, the clown; and Pantaloon, the old skinflint. Rich's pantomimes were so successful that other theaters began to copy him. Eventually a standard form developed for these entertainments. First there was an Opening, which told a familiar story or classical legend in verse and song—sometimes burlesquing the latest Italian opera playing at the Queen's Theatre in Haymarket but usually serious in tone. Then, by means of a magician or other benevolent agency that thwarted the powers of evil, the characters were transformed into Harlequin, Columbine, Pantaloon, Pierrot, and other Italian types, who went through a series of usually comic and acrobatic adventures mimed to music, known as a Harlequinade. The Harlequinade featured elaborate sets and costumes, and much stage machinery was employed to create impressive effects, such as characters flying or ascending into heaven (or, in one production, ascending into hell).

Audiences loved it. Alexander Pope was disgusted:

See now what Dulness and her sons admire!  
 See what the charms that smite the simple heart,  
 Not touched by nature, and not reached by art.  
 .....  
 Behold a sable sorcerer rise,  
 Swift to whose hand a winged volume flies;  
 All sudden, gorgons hiss and dragons glare,  
 And ten-horned fiends and giants rush to war,  
 Hell rises, Heaven descends; and dance on earth,  
 Gods, imps and monsters, music, rage, and mirth,  
 A fire, a jig, a battle and a ball,  
 Till one wide conflagration swallows all.  
 Thence a new world, to Nature's laws unknown,  
 Breaks out refulgent with a heaven its own;  
 Another Cynthia her new journey runs,  
 And other planets circle other suns.  
 The forests dance, the rivers upward rise,  
 Whales sport in woods, and dolphins in the skies;  
 At last, to give the whole creation grace,  
 Lo! one vast egg produces human race! (qtd. in Mander 8)

The public did not care about the opinions of the literary elite. They came to pantomimes in droves. In fact, pantomime's popularity



brought in so much revenue for the London theaters that it was virtually underwriting the productions of more purely literary plays. As the form developed during the eighteenth century, the Harlequinade characters began to speak and sing. In the nineteenth century, pantomime became more closely associated with the Christmas season, and the plots were drawn from popular stories and fairy tales rather than from classical myth and legend. The shows became longer, stand-alone productions, and pantomime became more and more a family entertainment. Even the literary elite began to enjoy the shows. Charles Dickens was a fan; he even edited the memoirs of the great Grimaldi, the most famous of the pantomime clowns.

The Victorian Era was the heyday of pantomime. By the mid 1800s it had become a lavish children's entertainment produced only at Christmas. In the 1850s elements of burlesque theater were introduced into pantomime, adding popular songs and new stock characters like the comic Dame played by a man in drag. The special effects grew more and more elaborate, as did the casts, which needed lots of extras to portray fairy troupes or comic armies. Every theater in London as well as regional theaters throughout the country produced a pantomime for Christmas, and much of the rest of the year went into planning and preparing for these productions.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Barrie began to escort the Llewelyn Davies boys to annual Christmas pantomimes, "panto," as it is often called, was a long-standing English tradition. The Harlequinade itself had shrunk to a short final scene at the end of an extravagantly produced fairy tale or other popular story. Aladdin and Cinderella were favorite pantomime subjects, and so was Robinson Crusoe, although it was not a Crusoe Defoe would have recognized. Children sat entranced by amazing transformation scenes that created magical fairy lands using every imaginable trick of lighting and stagecraft.

In 1901 Barrie took his young friends to a new Christmas pantomime called *Bluebell in Fairy Land*, written by its male star, Seymour Hicks. Unlike most pantos, which remounted the same popular stories again and again, *Bluebell* boasted an original plot not based on any traditional fairy tale. Several biographers suggest that this may have given Barrie the idea of writing his own original pantomime, although they also mention a private pantomime called "The Greedy Dwarf," which Barrie wrote, produced, and performed in his home on January 7, 1901. In any case, Barrie cannot be credited with being the first writer to conceive of an original story for a pantomime. Nor could Hicks. In

pantomime's then two-hundred-year history, original stories had been introduced now and again, after which they soon became "traditional" stories, as indeed *Peter Pan* was to become the "traditional" Christmas entertainment for English children for over a century.

In 1904, the original audience would have easily recognized *Peter Pan* as a pantomime. First of all, it was produced as one, scheduled for a short run during the Christmas season. The only unusual aspect of this panto, besides the original story, was the fact that it was written by a famous playwright of the legitimate stage. Despite (and maybe because of) its immense popularity, pantomime was still viewed as Pope had seen it: vulgar entertainment for the uneducated masses. Becoming a children's entertainment had actually improved pantomime's reputation among the intelligentsia. Even though children, like the masses, have not developed any discernment in theatrical matters, the late Victorians and the Edwardians had an idealized view of childhood and valued it highly. Most newspapers reviewed the pantomimes just as they would a new production of *Hamlet*, only with a difference in tone: arch or whimsical or patronizing. Nevertheless, one seldom found a well-known playwright contributing to the pantomime tradition. The mass appeal of pantomime is also why it has often been overlooked in literary history, just as early histories of children's literature ignored such widely popular forms as dime novels and penny dreadfuls and comic books. Most of the standard sources a Barrie scholar would consult never mention pantomimes.

Barrie's first audience also would have recognized and accepted numerous elements in *Peter Pan* as part of the pantomime. For example, the matter of casting provides important evidence. Peter Pan has almost always been played by a woman. This cross-gendered casting has puzzled some critics and Barrie biographers. They have come up with interesting and sometimes convoluted reasons to explain it. The favorite theory is that Barrie was working around a British law that made it illegal to have children under fourteen on stage after 9:00 at night. Casting a grown woman as Peter meant that the other children's roles could be scaled according to her height rather than a boy's, allowing older children to play younger parts (Birkin 105). Other scholars suggest that the part of Peter Pan was so demanding that a child could not have handled it. However, the most logical reason for the cross-gendered casting is that the male lead of a pantomime was always played by a woman. One of the burlesque elements introduced into pantomime in the 1850s was the practice of cross-gendered roles, usually

for comic effect. Thus, Cinderella's ugly stepsisters were usually played by men, preferably big, hairy men. Similarly, the young male lead was a role called Principal Boy, always played by a woman. There was a Principal Girl too, also played by a woman. In *Peter Pan*, Wendy is the Principal Girl. There was never any question that Peter Pan would be played by an actress. All but one of the Lost Boys were also portrayed by women, as was one of Wendy's younger brothers. The other brother, John, and the sixth Lost Boy were tall young male actors, and their size in comparison to the others was used for comic effect.

Ever since John Rich first introduced pantomime to an English audience, the serious Opening had ended with a benevolent agent transforming the classical characters into the humorous stock characters of the Harlequinade. The actors thus performed double roles in every pantomime. By Barrie's day, the Opening had itself been transformed into a humorous fairy play and the Harlequinade had all but disappeared, but the tradition of double casting is reflected in the dual role of Mr. Darling/Captain Hook. This hybrid character is a kind of Pantaloon figure: the enraged father chasing the trickster Harlequin, who has eloped with daughter Columbine. Why does Hook hate Peter Pan and constantly seek to kill him? Because Peter is Harlequin, and Pantaloon always goes after Harlequin.

Peter is clearly a Harlequin figure. According to Peter Holland, the role of Principal Boy originated as Harlequin (198). Harlequin was the star of the Harlequinade; he was adept at disguise and mimicry and was a gifted acrobat, musician, and dancer. Mostly, though, he was an inveterate trickster and magician. Peter Pan's antics and actions retain much of Harlequin's personality. His self-identification as "a little bird that has broken out of the egg" may actually be a tribute to John Rich, the original English Harlequin, who always portrayed Harlequin hatching from an egg—a famous bit of stage business (Wilson 22).

In a similar fashion, Columbine became Principal Girl, or Wendy in *Peter Pan*. The focus of Harlequin's affections, Columbine willingly ran off with him (though usually not with two younger brothers in tow) and participated in his various tricks and transformations. The Principal Girl, states Holland, is "a fantasy of girlhood. . . . Pretty but not beautiful, wholesome and innocent, the Principal Girl is the fantasy of the girl-next-door. . . . The figure is de-eroticized: a focus not for sexual desire but for sentimentalized, non-sexual, romantic love" (199). In Wendy's case, of course, her Harlequin, Peter Pan, seeks maternal love rather than romantic love, but with that exception, Holland's description fits Wendy perfectly.

Another type of pantomime character used in *Peter Pan* was the animal character. Actors call such roles “skin parts.” Wendy and her brothers have a large Newfoundland dog as their nursemaid. Nana, the dog, was usually played by a man, but never by an actual dog, although Barrie claims he allowed his pet Newfoundland to do a walk-on one night. In more minor roles, *Peter Pan* features several wolves and a very large crocodile. Individual actors were in the wolf costumes, but the crocodile had two actors—a front half and a back half. This was typical of traditional pantomimes, which often featured actors in animal costume. After all, most of the plots came from fairy tales. What would *Puss in Boots* be without Puss? Dick Whittington was also a favorite subject for pantomime, and his cat played an important part. *Mother Goose* always included a large goose, and *Robinson Crusoe* featured a dog. Animal characters were so popular that they were often introduced into stories that did not originally include animals, for example, a dog in *Aladdin*. Pantomimes were populated by comic cows, chickens, monkeys, storks, and other livestock.

The diminutive fairy Tinker Bell was also derived from the pantomime tradition. The Victorians had popularized fairylands in their pantomimes. *Bluebell in Fairy Land*, the panto some think inspired Barrie, had lots of fairies. The closing scene of *Peter Pan* also contained hundreds of fairies. Representing fairies by means of bells and stage lights was the normal practice, but seldom were they used as effectively as in the portrayal of Tinker Bell. Variations of the tinkling bell and the flickering light created the illusion of a real person with a complex personality. In this, as in many other ways, Barrie improved on usual pantomime practice.

Besides characters, much of the stage business in *Peter Pan* comes from the pantomime tradition. As Michael Booth explains in *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*,

In a real sense melodrama and pantomime were creations of technology. The very existence of new materials, new stage machinery, and new methods of lighting impelled them into a dramatic structure which in part existed to display the ingenuity of machinist, gasman, head carpenter, costume designer, and stage manager. (64)

Pantomime was thus ostentatious, extravagant, and elaborate, and it provided a grand display of technical virtuosity. All of Barrie’s biographers have commented on the difficulties of producing *Peter Pan* because of these very elements. They focus particularly on the problem

of flying across the stage. Although Barrie is often credited with inventing stage flight for *Peter Pan*, characters had been flying on stage in pantomime since the early 1700s. Barrie improved on the practice by hiring a professional aerialist to invent a new kind of harness. To protect himself and the theater, he required his actors to take out insurance policies before they learned to use the harness.

Elaborate sets and stage effects such as those in *Peter Pan* were standard in pantomime. Towards the end of every panto there was a transformation scene that was expected to outdo all the previous sets and effects. A character would cross the stage and wave a magic wand, then cue the music and the curtain. When the curtain rose on the transformation scene, the audience should gasp in wonder and continue to do so as the transformation unfolded. Booth describes the process:

The effects of a transformation, which might take twenty minutes to unfold, were dependent upon a combination of machinery, lighting, changing scenic pieces and gauzes, and the display of a large number of beautifully costumed women, some floating high above the stage. More than half the machinery for a transformation scene was worked from beneath the stage, and basically what happened was that a large platform suspended by ropes and counterweights rose through an opening in the stage created by removing that section of the stage floor during the preceding scene. On this platform were about twenty fairies, mermaids, water-nymphs, angels, or the like. . . . While this was going on the lighting intensified, gauzes were raised, scenery changed, the orchestra played, other performers appeared on stage, and the transformation moved in a leisurely way toward a climax. (80)

In the original production of *Peter Pan*, the transformation scene began when the minor character Liza, a housemaid (who was also in Barrie's whimsy listed on the program as author of the play), walked across the stage with the magic wand, which in the stage directions was referred to as Harlequin's wand, and initiated the transformation. The curtain opened on a scene of Peter's little house in the treetops, where Wendy is saying good-bye after her annual visit to do his spring cleaning. She leaves, and dusk settles as Peter plays his pipes and thousands of fairy homes start to twinkle around him. Music, lights, and set combined to create stage magic. This one scene is proof enough that *Peter Pan* is a pantomime because its only reason for existence is the pantomime tradition. The scene contributes nothing to the story of Peter Pan; the previous scene in the children's nursery was the natural end of the play.

Song and dance were also required elements in pantomime. However, pantomimes were not musicals the way *My Fair Lady* or *Okla-boma* is a musical; in panto the songs did not help to develop character and plot or set the mood. Years later there would be a musical version of *Peter Pan* on Broadway, not to mention the Disney musical cartoon, but the first production used music in a different way. It was musical like a variety show. There were set pieces so that various actors and actresses could show off their singing and dancing talents. In the opening scene, Mrs. Darling sang an old lullaby to her children and Peter performed a shadow dance. Later the pirates sang pirate songs, the Indians performed a tribal dance, and one of the Lost Boys did a well-received pillow dance. The songs and dances often changed from one production of *Peter Pan* to the next, according to the talents of the cast. For example, the pillow dance was the specialty of American actress Pauline Chase. After she was promoted to the role of Peter in later productions, the Lost Boys no longer did a pillow dance. This kind of change is a common feature of pantomime, as are elaborately staged mock battles like those between the Lost Boys and the pirates and between the Indians and the pirates.

One of the most famous moments in *Peter Pan* occurs when Tinker Bell has drunk from a poisoned cup to save Peter's life. Peter turns to the audience to save Tinker Bell, asking them to clap if they believe in fairies. And, of course, the audience claps resoundingly and Tinker Bell revives. According to most of Barrie's biographers, this was seen as a bit of risky stage business. What if the audience did not clap? However, it was not as risky as some people think. Audience participation was a standard part of pantomime, rather like melodrama, in which the audience is expected to boo and hiss when the villain enters and cheer the hero. In pantomime, ritual dialogues developed between characters and audience, and shouting back at the actors at set times was part of the entertainment. Although *Peter Pan* does not offer that level of audience involvement, Barrie could count on the fact that the audience was trained to respond to an actor's appeal, so they were bound to clap to save Tinker Bell.

Other common features of pantomime included panoramic tableaux and formal processions. As the play has come down to us, *Peter Pan* no longer contains either of those elements, but the first production featured both. When Wendy persuaded the Lost Boys to return with her to England, there was a procession of beautiful mothers who came to claim their lost sons. In fact, there were far more mothers than there were Lost Boys to be claimed. And after Peter vanquished Captain

Hook, the curtain opened on a Napoleonic tableau—Peter as a victorious Napoleon on the ship, with the other characters posed appropriately around him wearing French officers' uniforms. The scene was presented without motion or dialogue.

The main feature of the early pantomime—the Harlequinade—had shrunk almost out of existence by Barrie's day, but it was still the final scene of many pantomimes. The original manuscript for *Peter Pan* ends with a Harlequinade set in Kensington Gardens. Captain Hook appears as a schoolmaster; there are six schoolgirls accompanied by a governess, a couple of Lost Boys, Peter, and Tinker Bell (called in the manuscript Tippytoe). In this scene Peter and the boys are transformed into clowns (as Pierrot became known), the schoolgirls into Columbines, and the governess into Harlequin (Jack, "The Manuscript" 105). By this point in panto's development, Clown had replaced Harlequin as the trickster, with Harlequin relegated to a dancing role; thus Barrie transforms Peter into a clown rather than a harlequin. The clowns vanquish the schoolmaster, who then is finished off by a crocodile. According to Denis Mackail, Barrie's first biographer, "a harlequin and columbine flitted across the stage in the first acted version—who take part in a kind of ballet with a corps of assistant-[school]masters" (352). This scene was dropped almost immediately, but it provides more evidence that Barrie was writing a pantomime. The governess was clearly meant to be a comic Dame and would have been played by a man in drag. The only sign of the Harlequinade that remained in the early productions of *Peter Pan* was the stage direction for the transformation scene, which specifically states that Liza carries a Harlequin wand. From its earliest days, pantomime included this object, often called Harlequin's bat and viewed as a phallic symbol. Harlequin used it as a magic wand to transform characters and scenery into new and unusual people and things. Liza and the Harlequin wand did not make it into any of the published texts of *Peter Pan*, so all traces of the Harlequinade have disappeared.

Peter Pan would not exist if not for the pantomime tradition. Pantomime was at the back of Barrie's mind even in *The Little White Bird*, which contains an episode featuring figures from a Harlequinade. From his first appearance in print, Peter was associated with panto, a term which might have been Barrie's inspiration for calling his most famous creation Peter "Pan." Even if pantomime remains a mere inkblot in the history of theater, it deserves to be remembered for this contribution to children's literature. Of course, it is also only one of

many influences on a play that transcends any kind of literary dissection, as we hope this collection of essays will show.

### *PETER PAN'S REVERBERATIONS*

Peter Pan seems to be the mightiest figure in children's literature, for most writers, especially fantasy writers, have to wrestle with his image at some point, either happily admitting the influence or so steeped in it that they do not even recognize it. He is a slippery sort, leaving his traces on our stories or his shadow to haunt us. He engages us in secret dialogue so that we continue the conversation that Barrie began, arguing the silliness of Neverland even as we manage to squeeze Peter into our literary dreams.

We grew up with Peter Pan in the 1950s and early '60s with two separate versions: Disney's animated film (1953) and the frequent showings on television of Mary Martin's flying acrobatics.<sup>3</sup> Of course, we all know how Disney appropriated the story and well-nigh galvanized it into a simple tale that belies both the complexity of Barrie's story and of growing up in general. Then there was mother-obsessed Steven Spielberg's *Hook* (1991), which drew on pop psychology's concept of the inner child as Robin Williams's Peter Banning, who has grown up to resemble the piratous Hook, realizes that he has to recover his lost childhood in order to become a better parent. Offering an early celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the play, P. J. Hogan's *Peter Pan* came out as a live-action film in 2003, one that makes clear the seductive relationship between Peter and almost every other major character as it attempts to give Wendy more agency; she is sexually frustrated, but then so are Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily and the mermaids (and probably even Hook). The most recent movie to tackle Peter Pan is *Finding Neverland* (2004). Unlike the earlier versions, which tried to repeat or revise the original play, *Finding Neverland* somewhat inaccurately examines the creation of Peter Pan, drawing a sentimental (albeit engaging) portrait of Barrie, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, and her boys. Continuing the sexual overtones of 2003's *Peter Pan*, *Finding Neverland* attempts to retrieve Barrie's virility, suggesting a physical relationship with his wife Mary Ansell as well as posing star Johnny Depp as a cricket player, sitting on a bench with legs askew and looking as though his machismo is latent but not absent.<sup>4</sup> Although the film reenacts the first production of *Peter Pan* with the title character played by an actress, it is clear that Barrie's Peter Pan is male.



The centenary of *Peter Pan* reminds us how influential Barrie's story has been and continues to be; not just popular culture but also much of children's literature is informed (and misinformed) by Barrie's ideas. Some novels are strongly redolent of Barrie, as is Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* (1975). Here, Peter is embodied as Jesse Tuck, part of a family who once drank from a mysterious stream and have not grown older for decades; Jesse looks and acts 17 but is really 104. Wendy becomes Winnie, who is attracted to the winsome boy, especially when he gives her some of the magic water and tempts her to drink from it when she turns 17 so that they can wander around the world in never-ending youthful gaiety. The other members of the Tuck family are clearly miserable, wishing they were mortal; Angus Tuck explains to Winnie that they are excluded from the cycle of life and are unnatural. Readers are left guessing until the end of the novel as to whether or not Winnie drinks the water; a final scene set many years later shows the Tucks returning to Winnie's town and visiting her grave.

Even more than *Tuck Everlasting*, which tries to warn young readers of the inappropriateness and unnaturalness of everlasting life, Nancy Farmer's *The Ear, the Eye and the Arm* (1994) offers readers both characters and plot that parallel that of *Peter Pan*. Set in Zimbabwe in 2194, the story involves three children who are kidnapped but also includes several characters who cannot or will not grow up: Trashman, who is mentally challenged and has no short-term memory, and the Mellow, who is the children's irresponsible nanny/storyteller (who also is afraid of being thrown to the crocodiles). Clearly these characters, although quite likeable, are not to be admired. Tendai, the oldest child, wonders, "What would it be like to go outside the way everyone else did and fly—all alone, without bodyguards or the police or Father—to a magical place none of them had seen before?" (24). The places the children are taken to are far from magical. Even Resthaven, where time has essentially stopped in order that a select few people can maintain the tribal lifestyle of an earlier century, is dangerous because it is stagnant; and Tendai, while at first tempted to stay, eventually sees how it is suffocating him and his siblings. Throughout, Farmer tries to both borrow from and argue with *Peter Pan*'s legacy, especially when the children's father, who had kept them isolated and inexperienced within their highly guarded enclave, says after they have been kidnapped, "Why, why didn't I let them grow up?" (51). *The Ear, the Eye and the Arm* is a warning to parents and children that staying child-like is just plain

dangerous; survival requires that children be taught how to take care of themselves, to be wary rather than naïve, self-reliant rather than dependent.

More recently, Phyllis Shalant's *When Pirates Came to Brooklyn* (2002) tries to dramatize the enormous effect the several popular productions of *Peter Pan* had on children: in 1960, two lonely girls—one Christian, one Jewish—develop a friendship based on their re-enacting the adventures of Peter Pan.<sup>5</sup> They fight pirates and practice flying, while slowly helping their parents let go of their religious prejudices. The novel is realistic, but it contains one brief foray into fantasy: Lee actually does fly once to visit her friend, and there is a bit of evidence to show that the event was not a dream.

Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's *Peter and the Starcatchers* (2004) is currently getting the most attention, perhaps because it is billed as a prequel to Barrie's story. *Starcatchers* attempts to explain Peter's ability to fly and the original identities of Hook, the pirates, the redskins, the mermaids, and the Lost Boys. The major female, Molly, has more in common with Avi's Charlotte Doyle than with Wendy, as the authors deliberately allow her to display as much or more derring-do as Peter himself. *Peter and the Starcatchers* is admittedly an engaging adventure story, but any attempt to explain Peter Pan and Neverland—to logically figure out how Peter got there—seems somehow dull and unmagical, even though *Starcatchers* itself employs fantasy in the guise of alien fairy dust, which is what enables Peter to fly. This novel tries to take away the veil, to expose the falsity of the magician's trick, while replacing the veil with another, less fascinating one. *Starcatchers* is not complex enough or imaginative enough (or controversial enough) to have the continuing influence of Barrie's creation.

As much as these contemporary stories seem to want to revise the image of Peter Pan and impress upon child readers the necessity of growing up, they actually revise only Disney's popular image of Peter Pan, not the Peter Pan of Barrie's play and novel. As many readers come to realize, and as Barrie himself tells us, *Peter Pan* is a tragic tale. Even as children, we know it is not just that "[a]ll children, except one, grow up" (*Peter and Wendy* 1) but that all children, except one, *want* to grow up; and as adults we feel like the grown-up Wendy, "a grown woman smiling at it all, but they were wet smiles" (218), feeling his loneliness, his bravado, his loveless life. Peter Pan does not love us and does not remember us, and that is exactly why we love and remember him, because we know what he is missing.

## THE ESSAYS

The fifteen essays in this collection offer a wide array of new readings of *Peter Pan*, interpretations that challenge our smug belief that we already know all there is to know about this story. The essays are highly provocative and enlightening and, though diverse, all connect with the theme of time—whether examining the contemporary influences on Barrie as he created *Peter Pan* (Part I: In His Own Time); the impact *Peter Pan* has had on children's literature and culture in the ensuing decades in the United States (Part II: In and Out of Time—*Peter Pan* in America); the problematic narrative and time structures of the play and novel (Part III: Timelessness and Timeliness of *Peter Pan*); and recent feminist approaches to the texts (Part IV: Women's Time). These essays document the continuing interest of *Peter Pan* not just to children but to children's literature criticism as it connects to cultural, psychoanalytical, feminist, historical, and linguistic theories.

*Part I: In His Own Time.* We begin our centenary celebration of *Peter Pan* with a lively essay by Karen Coats, who discusses the relationship between Hook and Peter in terms of child hatred in "Child-Hating: *Peter Pan* in the Context of Victorian Hatred." Drawing on James Kincaid's theories of pedophilia and Christopher Lane's theories of Victorian misanthropy, Coats argues that Hook represents our societal need to manage our general hatred of children. Coats's essay is followed by "The Time of His Life: Peter Pan and the Decadent Nineties," in which Paul Fox reads Barrie's story as a reflection of Walter Pater's aesthetics. Drawing parallels with both Pater and Oscar Wilde, Fox posits Peter Pan as a successful aesthete, living in the moment, continually recreating himself in order to defeat creative stagnation—that is, time. Our third contributor, Christine Roth, argues that *Peter Pan*, long considered the exemplar of the Cult of the Boy Child, is instead a carryover from the Victorian Cult of the Girl Child. Tracing the transformation of focus from boy as simultaneously mature and boyish, Roth's "Babes in Boy-Land: J. M. Barrie and the Edwardian Girl" shows how Barrie's female characters display alternating visions of the girl as innocent and worldly, daughter and mother, Wendy and Mrs. Darling. From the Cult of the Girl Child we move on to what might be called the Cult of the Pirate with Jill May's "James Barrie's Pirates: *Peter Pan*'s Place in Pirate History and Lore," which examines the influence of pirate lore—from operettas to childhood adventure stories to biographical accounts—on Barrie's creation of Captain Hook. The final essay in Part I is Kayla

McKinney Wiggins's "More Darkly down the Left Arm: The Duplicity of Fairyland in the Plays of J. M. Barrie." Wiggins tracks the emergence of fairy lore in three of Barrie's plays: *Peter Pan*, *Dear Brutus*, and *Mary Rose*. All three employ elements of British (and particularly Celtic) fairy stories, drawn from Barrie's Scottish childhood.

*Part II: In and Out of Time—Peter Pan in America.* In "Problematising Piccaninnies, or How J. M. Barrie Uses Graphemes to Counter Racism in *Peter Pan*," Clay Kinchen Smith uses Derrida's concept of the grapheme to argue that Barrie is attempting to undermine racial stereotypes. Unfortunately, Barrie's political agenda has been overshadowed by the many revisions of his work, especially Disney's 1953 film, that reinscribe the racialist characterizations. Following Smith's contribution, Rosanna West Walker tackles Barrie's influence on Willa Cather in "The Birth of a Lost Boy: Traces of J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* in Willa Cather's *The Professor's House*." Walker offers a convincing argument that Cather was engaging with Barrie's myth, notably in her focus on the avoidance of maturity in the major male characters of her 1925 novel *The Professor's House*.

*Part III: Timelessness and Timeliness of Peter Pan.* Part III opens with Irene Hsiao's "The Pang of Stone Words," which examines the binary of print literacy and orality and how this opposition structures the characters in *Peter Pan*. Even though Peter Pan is illiterate and too forgetful to tell a story, while Hook is a noted raconteur, these two characters are remarkably alike. From print literacy we segue to computer literacy with Cathlena Martin and Laurie Taylor's "Playing in Neverland: *Peter Pan* Video Game Revisions." Martin and Taylor contend that because of its origin in oral storytelling and because of the modular structure of the story, *Peter Pan* is ideally suited to video game narratives and offers potential for opening up the story for more participation by female characters and female players. In "The Riddle of His Being: An Exploration of Peter Pan's Perpetually Altering State," Karen McGavock examines the fluidity of Barrie's story and main character. The gender uncertainty, the playful narrator, and Barrie's constant revisions of the story all display the same fear of fixity and stagnation. Similarly, in "Getting Peter's Goat: Hybridity, Androgyny, and Terror in *Peter Pan*," Carrie Wasinger writes that the indeterminacy of gender, though common to Victorian audiences, was both threatening to Victorian gender distinctions and progressive. Wasinger argues that *Peter Pan*'s unstable narration allows readers to better identify with Peter's gender uncertainty. A different kind of uncertainty—the anxiety of influence—concerns John

Pennington in “Peter Pan, Pullman, and Potter: Anxieties of Growing Up.” This essay highlights Philip Pullman and J. K. Rowling, who both publicly claim they dislike *Peter Pan* and the concept of never growing up, but who are nevertheless indebted to Barrie. Both reject Barrie’s emphasis on maintaining innocence and make the dark undertones, the tragedy, more overt, allowing their characters—pushing their characters—into emotional, social, and sexual maturity. The last essay in this section offers a provocative Lacanian reading of *Peter Pan*: David Rudd’s “The Blot of Peter Pan.” Drawing on Barrie’s short story of the same name (1926), Rudd argues that Peter Pan acts as “the maternal phallus” in his pre-Symbolic state.

*Part IV: Women’s Time.* Neverland is an unconscious creation of Mrs. Darling, says M. Joy Morse in “The Kiss: Female Sexuality and Power in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*.” Explaining first the historical context for the ambivalent position of wives and mothers in the late nineteenth century, Morse goes on to show how Mrs. Darling’s ambivalence over her societal roles is reflected in her dream about Neverland. Like Morse, Emily Clark is interested in women’s roles in Victorian England, but in “The Female Figure in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*: The Small and the Mighty,” she examines those roles against the backdrop of British colonialism. Focusing on the physical attributes and dialogue of Wendy, Tinker Bell, and Tiger Lily, Clark finds that all three characters overcome their liminality to some degree by appropriating agency for themselves.

Through these essays, our understanding of *Peter Pan* is broadened, our own boundaries of meaning stretched, and our fixed borders torn down. Truly, Barrie’s creation is an evocative text, still flirting with readers to declare new meanings. It is nevertheless nice to know that *Peter Pan* will never be settled, but will always be controversial and always, we hope, read.

## NOTES

1. When Barrie wrote the play *Peter Pan*, his name already adorned twenty published volumes (novels, collections of stories, nonfiction) and twelve London plays. Several of the books were best sellers, and one of the plays was *The Admirable Crichton*, the most popular and critically acclaimed of Barrie’s plays for adult audiences.

2. Barrie’s original name for his imaginary wonderland was The Never Never Land. He soon edited it to The Never Never Land, then to The Never Land, and finally to Neverland.

3. Mary Martin's debut as Peter Pan on Broadway, which coincided with the release of Disney's animated film (1953), was staged live on television in 1955 and again in 1956. In 1960, Martin's performance was videotaped and was shown several times through the 1970s.

4. In real life, Barrie was an avid cricket player. He was the captain of a private cricket team, the Allahakbarries, composed mostly of artists and authors and better known for socializing than for winning cricket games.

5. The characters discover a male cologne called, oddly, Pirate's Booty. Even more bizarre is a snack food by Robert's American Gourmet called Pirate's Booty that can be found now in grocery stores. The sexual meaning of the modern slang word "booty" seems to have escaped both children's authors and snack food manufacturers.

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Whatever Barrie's imaginative powers, Peter Pan premiered in 1904, a full ten years before the start of World War One. But Timothy Sheeder and Liam Steel's ingenious production will have you checking your dates (as I did). This is a director's concept that fits the story, and the backstory, so frightening well, that it's hard to imagine that it's not exactly what the original writer intended. Boys when he first conceived Peter Pan (who first appeared in his 1902 novel *The Little White Bird*), they were prime military service age when war was declared. Hiran Abeysekera as Peter in Peter Pan at the Open Air Theatre. Do you have a time-machine so that I can sneak in and see it?! Leave A Comment Cancel reply. Comment. JM Barrie bequeathed all rights to Peter Pan to Great Ormond Street hospital. Its imminent expiry is set to revive the debate over copyright term. Detail from the Peter Pan statue outside Great Ormond Street hospital. Time is running out for the boy who wouldn't grow up. Peter Pan's copyright expires at the end of the month ending a 70-year legacy for his custodians at Great Ormond Street children's hospital. A vital source of funding for the hospital will come under threat from January 1 when Peter and his Neverland companions are thrust into the public domain. Author JM Barrie bequeathed all the rights to Peter Pan to the hospital in 1929 and they have provided badly needed funds ever since. time; but at last Wendy just got through, with mumps reduced to twelve six, and the two kinds of measles treated as one. There was the same excitement over John, and Michael had even a narrow squeak; but both were kept, and soon, you might have seen the three of them going in a row to Miss Fulsom's Kindergarten school, accompanied by their nurse. He was a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees but the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth. When he saw she was a grown-up, he gnashed the little pearls at her. Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. Peter Pan. Peter and Wendy. Peter Pan is a fictional character created by Scottish novelist and playwright J. M. Barrie. A free-spirited and mischievous young boy who can fly and never grows up, Peter Pan spends his never-ending childhood having adventures on the mythical island of Neverland as the leader of the Lost Boys, interacting with fairies, pirates, mermaids, Native Americans, and occasionally ordinary children from the world outside Neverland. JM Barrie created the childhood hero Peter Pan, but a new book reveals the lengths the author went to in order to find his own 'lost boys'. The boys - five in all, eventually - were the sons of a struggling lawyer, Arthur Llewelyn Davies, and his wife Sylvia. Barrie's malignant influence also extended into the rest of the du Maurier family. As a baby, he had flown out of the nursery to play with the fairies in the park, and then, when he tried to get back home, he found the window barred and his mother nursing another little boy. He returned to his fantasy world only because the real world had rejected him - which was just how Sir James Barrie, for all the honours heaped on him, felt about himself.