‘His Terrible Masterpiece’

A Study of *Peter Pan*, its Reception and its Creator

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‘Genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will.’

(Charles Baudelaire ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, 1863)

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INTRODUCTION

‘My puppets seem more real to me than myself.’[1]

Literary history can show a number of fictional characters who either in their own time or for posterity have come to transcend the fairy tale, novel, short story or play in which they started their lives. Once in a while a writer comes along who has the ability to inspire the imagination of readers and audiences everywhere. Figures as various as Ebenezer Scrooge, Romeo and Juliet, Holden Caulfield, Winnie-the-Pooh and Cinderella have all to a certain extent taken on existences far removed from the work they first appeared in, and away from the author who created them. Scrooge has become the ultimate reference when describing pettiness and greed, while Romeo and Juliet have come to represent the willingness to sacrifice anything in order to have true love. Holden Caulfield is a common reference in popular culture, and Winnie-the-Pooh’s physical features are so easily recognised that he is distinguishable anywhere. There seems to be some form of universality identified by the public which can make these characters independent of time, place and history.

Many of these characters can be related to fairy tales and in extension of this to children’s literature. Several of them originate from British children’s books and especially from around the time in British literary history referred to as ‘the golden age of children’s literature,’ starting with Lewis Carroll’s publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 and continuing with authors like Edward Lear, Beatrix Potter, Kenneth Grahame, Frances Hodgson Burnett, J.M. Barrie and A.A. Milne. One character who seems to stretch the limit of this type of removal further than any other is Peter Pan. With the creation of the eternal boy, author James Matthew Barrie initiated a still ongoing fascination with a figure who has become a cultural icon. Peter Pan has been endlessly recreated on stage, in various

[1] J.M. Barrie, *Courage* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), p. 9.

literary forms and on screen. The character represents an idea of eternal youth and innocence that seems to transcend time and hit some core within the human soul. Ann Yeoman claims that:

> I think it is safe to assume that almost everyone exposed to modern Western culture knows Peter Pan, that is, is familiar with the personality traits and boyish heroism he embodies, and the compelling ideal of childhood discovered on his island kingdom of Neverland. However elusive or frustratingly irresponsible he may be, few would champion his arch-enemy, Captain Hook, over Peter Pan's magnetic figure of joy, spontaneity and youth.[2]

It is the general symbolism and character traits of Peter himself that fascinate people. In their eyes he is a free spirited hero, fearlessly fighting Hook. He is the little man taking on a much larger enemy in a battle he in the real world would be bound to lose. He also represents a time of innocence and the small child inside us all.

Not only has Peter Pan become an established reference within popular culture, which can be seen as an extension of the original form. The general interpretation of the character has been further extended to comprise fields that one would normally not connect with literature and fairy stories. He has been used in commercial advertising, in connection with brand names, and in 1983 Dan Kiley published a book that inspired the introduction of a new term in the field of popular psychology.[3] A significant facet of the incorporation of the character into popular culture is the almost complete removal of the author. In the case of *Peter Pan* we see an example of how popularisation of the fictional work has erased the author, making him an insignificant factor in reception.

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[2] Ann Yeoman, *Now or Neverland: Peter Pan and the Myth of Eternal Youth: A Psychological Perspective on a Cultural Icon* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1998), p. 11.

[3] In the US 'Peter Pan' is a well established brand of peanut butter produced by ConAgra Foods. The product has maintained the name since 1928 after first having been called 'E.K. Pond'; Dan Kiley, *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men who Have Never Grown Up* (New York, NY: Dodd Mead, 1983).

The creator of the original Peter Pan, James Matthew Barrie, was born on May 9th 1860 into the small weaver community of Kirriemuir in Scotland. Since Barrie never kept a diary and was always very cautious when it came to disclosing personal information, his biography has had to be mapped together through letters, notebooks and biographical information provided by the author in some of his semi-fictional works.[4] Barrie's mother encouraged the education of her children, the girls as well as the boys. Margaret Ogilvy, who in keeping with Scottish tradition kept her maiden name after her marriage, was a strong woman and an influence in the childhood of her future writer son. His father is remarkably absent from Barrie's biography. Little Jamie grew up in the shadow of his older brother David, the latter being their mother's undisputed favourite. Barrie himself showed little academic promise, was not athletic like his brother and also unusually small for his age. When Barrie was six, David died after a skating accident. The remarkably odd relationship which developed between the mother and her surviving son, resulted in a closeness that would continue right up until Margaret's death in 1895. Barrie wrote his mother letters every day and she always slept with his latest letter under her pillow.

Margaret Ogilvy supplied her son with tales from her girlhood and young adult life throughout his early years. Many of these stories were centred on the religious cult the Old Lights, or in Scottish the Auld Lichts, which she had belonged to before her marriage. Barrie also loved to read adventure stories and especially 'Penny Dreadfuls'[5]. Soon he started to make the adventure stories himself and to write them down. Before the age of thirteen he had an idea that he wanted to be a writer, but his literary ambitions were put on hold when he attended Dumfries Academy. Here he experienced theatre for the first time, and it turned out

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[4] The biographical information in this section has been collected from three different works. My sources have been Andrew Birkin's *Barrie and the Lost Boys* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), Lisa Chaney's *Hide-and-Seek with Angels: A Life of J.M. Barrie* (London: Hutchinson, 2005) and Jackie Wullschläger's, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A.A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 2001). The most extensive collection of Barrie material is kept in *The Walter Beinecke Jnr Collection* as a part of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. This collection contains the larger parts of the author's letters and manuscripts, as well as his forty-eight notebooks.

[5] These were a kind of published, illustrated stories which preceded adventure comics.

that he was more interested in what went on behind the stage than on it. The interest in theatre was further sparked when he joined a newly formed drama club at school, and it was here that Barrie wrote his first play, *Bandelero the Bandit*. A local clergyman called the play immoral, and this unintentionally drew attention to its writer. Notebooks from his years at Dumfries speak of a boy feeling different because of his lack in height, and regressing into shyness and being intimidated by the other sex. In 1878 he left the academy and went home, determined to be a writer. Barrie's ambition did not correspond with his mother's expectations. Partly due to pressure and a sense of obligation, he matriculated at Edinburgh University. This became a lonely period in his life and his shyness grew even more. From his notebooks one sees that he was preoccupied with why he could not take interest in the same things as his peers. The years at university made him even more determined to pursue a career in writing. Soon after he achieved an MA, his sister saw an advertisement in *The Scotsman* offering the job as a writer in a newspaper in England. Barrie applied and secured a job with the *Nottingham Journal*, starting his life as a journalist.

The job as leader-writer consisted mostly of writing on topics decided by the editor. To make the contents more interesting and diverse, Barrie developed a technique where he imagined himself being a specific person or specific type, writing from their point of view. He wrote funny, satirical pieces, and sentiment and whimsicality would soon become his hallmarks. When he in October 1884 found himself out of work, he started shipping his writings around to publishers in London. Some of Barrie's stories were inspired by the ones told by his mother in his childhood. 'An Auld Licht Community' was published in the *St James's Gazette* on November 17th 1884. When he next supplied the editor, Frederick Greenwood, with some writing on a different subject, Greenwood asked for the Scottish stories. Following the success of the publication of more of his mother's childhood memories,

Barrie decided to head for London in pursuit of a career. By 1887 he was a regular contributor to some of the largest publications in Britain.

In 1888 Barrie wrote, and on his own expense published, his first novel, *Better Dead*. The critics liked it, but thought that it seemed too deviously constructed, and showed too little heart. The author's next step was to collect some of his Auld Licht stories in a book which Hodder and Stoughton published as *Auld Licht Idylls* in April. It was soon followed by *A Window in Thrums*, Thrums being the name of a fictional community based on Kirriemuir. Barrie was now hailed by the critics and the third book in the series *The Little Minister*, published in 1891, became an international bestseller, with American publishers printing their own pirate copies. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote to Henry James praising Barrie's tales of their fellow Scotland. Stevenson later wrote to the newly famous writer himself, initiating a correspondence which would continue until Stevenson's death in 1894. In spite of the author's shyness, his circle of friends now expanded to include writers such as George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Arthur Conan Doyle, H.G. Wells, P.G. Wodehouse, Jerome K. Jerome and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. His profound interest in cricket had in 1890 lead him to form the cricket club 'The Allahakbars' (later renamed 'The Allahakbarries' in a tribute to its founder), which consisted of friends and fellow writers. The club became a forum for fun as well as literary discussion.

Even though he concentrated on journalism and stories, Barrie's interest in the theatre had not diminished. His fascination with young actresses only inspired the budding playwright more. In 1891 he co-wrote *Richard Savage* with Marriott Watson. His first real success on the stage was *Ibsen's Ghost*, a one-act play which followed two months later. The play, which was a parody on Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler, Ghosts* and *A Doll's House,* put the author on the map as a highly skilled satirist.[6] J.L. Toole, who directed it, also took care of

[6] Henrik Ibsen originally wrote *A Doll's House* in 1879, while *Ghosts* appeared in 1881, followed by *Hedda Gabler in* 1890.

Barrie's next piece, *Walker, London*. For this play they cast the actress Mary Ansell for one of the leading parts.

On July 9th 1894 Mary Ansell and Barrie married. For a wedding present the author gave his new wife the first of many St. Bernard dogs. At the time he was working on an idea originally titled 'The Sentimentalist'. It was a story about a writer named Tommy who had trouble forming bonds with people, and especially with the women around him. The first thought was that the story would be about a grown man, but after a while Barrie became increasingly interested in this man's childhood. The resulting novel, *Sentimental Tommy*, was published in 1896. The title comes from a comment made by Tommy's schoolmaster in the book. He calls his pupil sentimental because his strong sense of empathy causes him to adapt the feelings of others, making them his own.

In March 1895 James and Mary Barrie had moved into a new house in 133 Gloucester Road in London. The house was close to Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. In September the same year Margaret Ogilvy died as Barrie was on his way to Scotland to visit her. Her death inspired him to set to work on a biography and *Margaret Ogilvy: By Her Son* was published in December 1896. In hindsight the book has been said to disclose more about the author than about his mother. The same year the Barries went to America with the author's agent Arthur Addison Bright. On this trip Barrie was to producer Charles Frohman. The two found that they shared a common childlike enthusiasm and bonded instantly. Frohman would later produce many of Barrie's plays both in Britain and in America. After his return the author started writing a sequel to the story of Tommy. The novel, *Tommy and Grizel*, not published until 1900, is by many critics deemed to be among Barrie's best work. Many regard it as a reflection of his, at that time, already failing marriage.

In 1897 Barrie met two brothers while walking in Kensington Gardens. George and Jack Llewelyn Davies, respectively five and four years old, were accompanied by their nurse

Mary Hodgson and their babybrother Peter. George and the much older author struck up a remarkable friendship that would change Barrie's writing forever. In December the same year he found himself invited to a dinner party at Sir George and Lady Lewis's house where he for the first time met the mother of his child friends, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies.[7] A friendship and mutual understanding soon developed between the author and the young woman. The connection was intense, and Sylvia's husband, Arthur, expressed concern that Barrie took part in their family life in a very intrusive manner. Arthur never grew comfortable with the close bond between Barrie, his wife and his sons.

While writing *Tommy and Grizel*, Barrie also made extensive notes on a new novel inspired by and starring his little friend George. In the book the boy would be called David in eerie remembrance of the author's dead brother. *The Little White Bird*, which was published in 1902, was originally designed for an adult readership, but in it lay the grounds for the play which would immortalise Peter Pan. In September the same year *The Admirable Crichton* opened at the Duke of York Theatre. It was a satirical, social commentary on the class system in England. As the author was finishing *The Little White Bird*, he and his wife moved closer to Kensington Gardens, into a house in Bayswater Road, Leinster Corner. Just after the move Barrie received the news that his father had been run over by a horse and cart, dying form his injuries.

In the summer of 1901 the Barries and the Llewelyn Davies family had holidayed, not far from each other, at Tilford. The author and his wife stayed at Black Lake Cottage. Together with the boys, he created a whole fictional world based in the nearby woods. For the duration of their stay, the world consisted only of adventure, pirates and expeditions far into the jungle where Porthos, the dog, played the part of various wild animals. Barrie, who was a

[7] Sylvia's maiden name was du Maurier, and she was the daughter of George du Maurier, author of the two books *Peter Ibbetson* and *Trilby*. Barrie's dog Porthos was actually named after one of the characters in *Peter Ibbetson*. Sylvia was also the sister of actor Gerald du Maurier, father of Daphne du Maurier, whos most famous work was and continues to be, the chilling novel *Rebecca* from 1938, see Birkin, p. 45.

passionate photographer, documented their adventures for posterity. In remembrance, he had a book printed titled *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island*.[8] The memories from that summer and the stories in *The Little White Bird* were contributing factors to the early notes Barrie made in his notebook on November 23 1903. Coincidentally the notes, which were to become the play *Peter Pan*, were made on the evening of the birth of the fifth Llewelyn Davies brother, Nicholas (Nico for short), the fourth, Michael, having been born already in 1900. In the year to come, Barrie worked on something which would become a roman-a-clef (only in the form of a play) within his own oeuvre, as well as canonised within the entire genre of children's literature. The story of Peter Pan now developed into a separate piece of work due to premiere at the Duke of York Theatre. On the night of the premiere on December 27th 1904, Frohman, in New York, waited for news of failure or success. The play, which was now called *Peter Pan or the Boy Who Would not Grow Up*, became the talk of the season.

By 1905 the Llewelyn Davies family had moved into the country, and Barrie, to Arthur's dismay, started visiting them frequently. It was by now clear that Arthur was suffering from cancer of the jaw. Barrie waited anxiously by Sylvia's side while he recovered after an operation. In September Barrie took the brothers on a fishing trip to Scotland to give them a rest from the unhappy situation at home. In November *Peter Pan* opened in America and the success continued. In 1906 Hodder and Stoughton decided to extract the Peter stories from *The Little White Bird*, publishing them in a separate illustrated edition titled *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.[9] In April, the year after, Arthur lost the fight against cancer and died. Barrie now took on complete responsibility for the remaining family, mapping out and paying for the boys' future.

[8] There were only two copies made of the book. One of them Barrie kept for himself, while he gave the other as a gift to Arthur Llewelyn Davies. Arthur later claimed that he left his copy on a train by accident. The only surviving copy is now kept in *The Walter Beinecke Jnr Collection* at Yale University.
[9] The illustrator, Arthur Rackham, was also responsible for the illustrations in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Fairy Tales of the Brother's Grimm* and *Rip van Winkle*.

The author was active in the committee campaigning for abolition of censorship in the theatre. The secretary of the committee was actor Gilbert Cannan who was competing with Captain Robert Scott for the affections of sculptress Kathleen Bruce. When Bruce chose Scott, Cannan turned to Mary Barrie for consolation. In his caring for the Llewelyn Davies family, Barrie failed to see that his wife was having an affair. In July 1909 the situation was revealed to the author, this resulted in divorce being finalised in October the same year. Two days after the author's divorce hearings in court, Sylvia collapsed after having been feeling ill for some time. Again the family had been hit by cancer. As they had once seen their father, the boys now watched their mother dying before their eyes. She passed in late August the year after, with Barrie by her side. The author had never officially been guardian to the brothers, besides the two youngest. After Sylvia's death he deliberately changed her will so that he would be named guardian.[10] Barrie was now economically responsible for the boys. With their mother dead, the author devoted all his time to taking care of the brothers. After the divorce he had moved into a new flat in Adelphi Terrace House in Robert Street. This address would remain his home until his death. With the boys away at school, Barrie worked on novelising the play about Peter. *Peter and Wendy*, was published in 1911. Work was also commissioned for a Peter Pan statue that Barrie wanted to place in Hyde Park. The artist Sir George Frampton made the statue which was erected at night in April 1912. The author had wished that the statue would be there in the morning when the children arrived, as if having appeared by magic.

In February 1913 the news reached England that Captain Scott had lost his life in the attempt to be the first to reach the South Pole. As Scott was a close friend, Barrie mourned him greatly. Together with a diary left in Scott's tent, were letters he had written to his

[10] In her original will Sylvia had asked for Mary Hodgson's sister Jenny to help look after the boys. In a letter to Emma du Maurier, Sylvia's mother, Barrie deliberately transcribed it wrong, exchanging Jenny with Jimmy. His transcription was never contested and he and Emma du Maurier shared responsibility for the boys, see Birkin, p. 194.

acquaintances back home. One letter was directed to Barrie, asking him to take care of Scott's wife and his son who was also Barrie's godson.[11] To Barrie, Scott became the ultimate representative of the Peter Pan theme, a man on an adventure unlike any other who died and would always remain in the state when he was at his best. In 1909 Barrie had refused a knighthood, but in June 1914 he was appointed 'Baronet', now qualifying for the title Sir. With the outbreak of World War I, three of the Llewelyn Davies boys, George, Michael and Peter, reported for duty. Barrie set out on a mission to America to gather support for the allies. As the war wore on, he became less enthusiastic. From 1915 and for the duration of the war, the famous line 'To die will be an awfully big adventure' was removed from the productions of *Peter Pan*. In March 1915 George was killed in Flanders. He was buried in the British War Cemetery at Voormezelee. In May Charles Frohman was killed on his way to England when a German U-boat torpedoed the 'Lusitania' outside the coast of Ireland.

Michael had always been Barrie's favourite. The author had high hopes for the young man, who was intelligent and showed an aptitude for acting. After the war Michael went to study at Oxford. In the evening of May 19th 1921 Barrie walked out to post a letter he had written to Michael. He was approached by a reporter asking him whether he had any comments on the drowning. To Barrie's shock, Michael and his fellow student Rupert Buxton had been found dead in Sandford Pool. It was regarded as a swimming accident, but people have later speculated whether it was a suicide pact. The death of his favourite completely devastated Barrie, and he started an existence of living almost as a recluse in his flat. The strength in his life at this point became his newly acquired secretary Cynthia Asquith, who worked with him until his death. In 1928 he finally yielded and agreed to publish the play version of *Peter Pan* as a part of his collected works. The edition is prefaced by a dedication

[11] In his letter Scott expresses a profound fondness for the author, trusting him completely with the welfare of his family. 'As a dying man, my dear friend, be good to my wife and child. Give the boy a chance in life if the State won't do it. He ought to have good stuff in him. I never met a man in my life whom I admired and loved more than you', Robert Falcon Scott, *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition,* ed. by Max Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 416.

to the five Llewelyn Davies boys who had come to mean everything to him. In 1929 he made a decision which established his interest in the welfare of children once and for all. After having refused to lead an appeal for the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children in February, he, in April, unconditionally transferred the rights to *The Little White Bird, Peter Pan, Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy* to the hospital.[12]

In his later years, Barrie surfaced from his grief and returned to the theatre scene. His last play was thematically in accordance with the theme which had been a red thread through most of his work. He called it *The Boy David* and it was about the biblical King David. On June 19th 1937 Sir James Matthew Barrie died, Peter and Nico at his side. Condolences were many and included one from King George. On Barrie's expressed wish, he was taken home and buried in the cemetery in Kirriemuir.

The investigation into how people read and relate to a text is a focus in what is generally referred to as reception theory. It is a theory which first developed during the 1970's and 1980's as a reaction to the more narrowly textually focused readings which had for a while dominated literary research. Hans Robert Jauss says that the reader is an active part in the development of interpretation of text.[13] According to his theory the readers' 'horizons of expectation' decide the interpretive process. The combinations of the historical context of author and text with the reader's own experiences and preconceptions are deciding in the understanding of meaning. Changes within the reading community create diversity and alterations in the readings of text. Different individuals and schools of interpretation will therefore produce varying meanings form the same text. Contemporary reception study takes

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[12] The copyright expired in 1987 under British copyright law, the 'Copyright, Designs and Patent Bill'. This caused a ruling in the House of Lords to further the hospital's rights in the EU until 2007. During the 1990's the law was standardised through a directive issued by the EU to extend copyright until seventy years after an author's death. Even though the rights to *Peter Pan* were considered public domain at the time, the directive put them back under copyright law; see Council Directive 93/98/EEC of 29 October 1993 harmonizing the term of protection of copyright and certain related rights.

[13] Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, translated from German by Michael Shaw with an introduction by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982) and *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, translated form German by Timothy Bahti with an introduction by Paul de Man (Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

up both modern and post-modern elements. What these have in common is that they reject the formalist approach to text, favouring an inclusion of the historical context.

> Reception study undertakes the historical analysis of the changing conditions and reading practises through which texts are constructed in the process of being received.[14]

Before the text can be subject to reception, there has to be an author. The importance of the role of the author in the study of literary texts has shifted through the influence of theories of authorship. The discussion of authorship as a concept came to the forefront in literary discourse when Roland Barthes claimed the death of the author in his essay from 1967, saying that to define the meaning of a work by referring to the one who wrote it, was to put limits on the work, defining it within the head of its creator and making the author's intention the main focus of interpretation.[15] For the reader to have full freedom in which to make an interpretation, the author must be removed. According to Barthes 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author'.[16] In his essay from 1969 Michel Foucault described the role of the author as a function in literary discourse. Andrew Bennett compares the two theorists saying that while Barthes question concerns who is speaking in a text, Foucault asks whether it matters who is speaking. Barthes conclusion is that no one speaks but Foucault believes that our impression of who speaks is important because it contributes to our interpretation.[17] Foucault says that meaning does not depend on the name of the writer, the person behind is insignificant. The fact that you have signed your name to a letter does not make you an author. It is the sum of certain recognised characteristics present in this discourse that make up the author. In his essay on the authorfunction, he says that

> The coming into being of the notion of the 'author' constitutes

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[14] Introduction to *Reception Study: from Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, ed. by James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), p. xiii.
[15] Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author' was first introduced as a part of a seminar in 1967 and consequently published in *Aspen* magazine the same year, see Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 9-10.
[16] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author' in Seán Burke's *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), pp. 125-130, p. 130.
[17] Bennett, *The Author*, p. 19.

> the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the science.[18]

What is special about the authorfunction, according to Foucault, is that it attaches itself to the literary discourse. A scientific text is not validated by the name of the author but by the provability of the theory it describes. A literary text is graded depending on who wrote it, and what the surrounding circumstances of its production were. This makes the identity of the author a deciding factor in reception.

Both Barthes and Foucault agree on the fact that this authorfunction is not stable. It develops and changes with the currents in society. In later years we see a growing interest in the lives behind the works, a trend coherent with the general growing interest in biography. Bennett and Nicholas Royle say that 'our identifications with and ideas about the authors are, in the final analysis, themselves forms of fiction'.[19] Whether it is the person or the function it is a fact (that I will return to in Chapter Three) that the role of the author and 'the return to history' has become central questions in the discussions of a literary text.

Up until about three years ago my knowledge of Peter Pan basically extended to clips shown on Norwegian television at Christmas as a part of the Disney cavalcade presented every year. I remember seeing a production of the play once when I was very little, but my image of Peter has always been the one from the Disney cartoon. A more in-depth interest in Peter Pan was sparked during a university course in reception study. While reading about how texts are received differently at different times in history, and how some authors are canonised in their own time, I became preoccupied with the examples in which the works themselves are canonised at the expense of the author. In some instances the book or its character is more famous than the author. To me Peter Pan seemed one of the clearest examples of this. Most

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[18] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?' in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, second edition, ed. by David Lodge with Nigel Wood (Essex: Longman, 2000), p. 174.

[19] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Harlow: Longman, 2004), p. 25. Further information on the theory of authorship is taken from Seán Burke's *Authorship: from Plato to the Postmodern* and Andrew Bennett's *The Author*.

people believe him to be invented by Disney, while very few know that the story was originally based on a play written long before Disney's film. As a part of a later course on 'The return of the author', I developed a further interest in the authorfunction and in the author's biography. I was intrigued by how an author who was famous and regarded as one of he best by his own peers could be completely forgotten, while his character is one of the most recognised icons in Western popular culture. As I read up on Barrie and discovered what a conflicting personality he had, my interest was only heightened. These initial ideas became the basis for what I will be presenting in this thesis. The title derives from a quote by Peter Llewelyn Davies who called *Peter Pan* Barrie's 'terrible masterpiece'. Peter, who never came to terms with the impact the popularity of the story had had on his personal life, threw himself under a train in the London underground in 1960. Even in death he did not escape his namesake, papers worldwide announcing the death of Peter Pan.[20]

In the first chapter I am going to take a closer look at the original production of the play and its first reception. The narrative language of the author is in my opinion a source for explaining his ability and popularity as a writer. Because the full text of the play was not publicly available until 1928, I have chosen not to include any in-depth analysis of the use of language. After giving an account of the story, I will clarify its publication history. Then I will go on to try to show how certain cultural aspects in British society at the time, such as the idolisation of childhood and the strong tradition of fairy belief, had an impact on the initial popularity of the character. In undertaking a close reading of the play, I will try to accentuate the most important themes of the story, including what might be lost due to censorship. As a final point, I will elaborate on how the canonisation of the author in his own time may have contributed to the popularity of the character.

[20] Birkin, p. 1.

In Chapter Two I try to show how popularisation, exemplified by Disney's efforts, might have changed the original symbolism of the story, but also how it has been a massive contribution to the reinvention and further development of the character. After trying to place Peter Pan in a larger popular context, I will examine Walt Disney's personal relationship with the story, before going on to examine what he identified as the aims of the Disney Company. I will also try to establish Disney's role in, and impact on, popular culture. After this, I will show where the original story has changed through Disney's depiction. I am also going to elaborate on how the personal, political views of the filmmaker, and by extension the political climate influencing the US at the time, are visible in the feature cartoon. In the last part of the chapter I will, as a part of establishing a larger picture, discuss the issues of stability versus change in order to try and see whether this has any influence on the continued popularity of the character.

In Chapter Three I will concentrate on the influence of author biography on literary interpretation. After giving an historical overview of the changes in and popularity of biography as a genre, I am going to outline some of the critical views on the interpretive use of biography. I will also try and to explain why this topic is especially important in the case of Barrie. I will further establish how biographical information is evident in the critical readings of *Peter Pan.* Then I discuss the problems connected with this type of interpretation. I shall, as a conclusion, try and show how popular culture and literary critics seem to have taken two very different directions when it comes to using biography in interpretation.

The aim of this thesis is first to show the early reception of *Peter Pan*. A part of this is to consider how it might have been coloured by social and cultural currents existing in Britain at the time of the original production. It is also necessary to review the role played by Barrie in his time. Secondly, I am trying to portray how the further reception has been influenced by Disney's portrayal of the character, based on the general impact he has had on Western

culture. The common factor here is the appropriation of text and the reinvention and continuation of canonised material. One part of this is to investigate what happens when author biography is brought into interpretation and how that approach can both enrich and limit reception. I hope to show how to lock oneself into one set of beliefs or to relate one's perceptions to one set of interpretive principles limits the understanding of text. Appropriation and consequent change has in the case of Peter Pan been the very means for his continued existence.

1 *PETER PAN OR THE BOY WHO WOULD NOT GROW UP*

At the time of the first night of *Peter Pan*, Barrie was already well-established within the London cultural scene. According to Michael R. Booth, 'Barrie and Maugham dominated West-End comedy'.[21] Despite Barrie's wide range of plays, spanning from comedy to political satire, it is his children's play, consisting of fairies, pirates, Indians and flying children, which today stands out as his most familiar work. Yet after over a century, the character keeps reinventing itself, and as late as October 2006 an official sequel, commissioned by the Great Ormond Street Hospital, was published by Oxford University Press.[22]

In this first chapter I will concentrate on the original production of the play and I will begin by giving an account of the action. After this, I will look into how certain aspects in British society at the time helped establish the initial popularity of the Peter Pan character. After elaborating on some of the main themes, including certain omissions in the final production of the play, I will finish by considering how publication history and Barrie's recognition among his peers can have helped create further fame for his work.

The play

As noted in the introduction, due to Barrie's reluctance to publish his play, the first, publicly available, printed version of *Peter Pan* did not appear until 1928, as a part of the author's collected works. After the premiere of the play, the popular demand for the script to be published was continuously rejected by the author. Barrie was a perfectionist and his scripts always went through continuous revisions even during the run of the various plays. The following account of the play, and the analysis following later in this section are both based

[21] Michael R. Booth, 'Comedy and farce' *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre,* ed. Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 138.
[22] Geraldine McCaughrean, *Peter Pan in Scarlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

on the Hodder and Stoughton edition from 1928. The third act, The Mermaids' Lagoon, as it appears in this edition, was not a part of the original production of 1904. The stage directions of the printed version clearly show signs of being influenced by the novelised *Peter and Wendy*, published in 1911. It is difficult to see these directions as being there strictly for dramatic purposes.

At the opening of Act I, we find ourselves in the Darling family's nursery. The three children Wendy, John and Michael are preparing for bed. Mr. and Mrs. Darling are about to go out for dinner and the children are left alone with their nurse-maid, Nana, who is a St. Bernhard's dog. Mrs. Darling tells her husband of a face she thought she saw at the window, the face of a little boy. The boy has been there before, she says, and he was actually in the room, but Nana chased him away. Last time, the boy's shadow was caught in the window, resulting in Mrs. Darling rolling it up and storing it in a drawer. Mr. and Mrs. Darling are interrupted by Nana arriving with a bottle containing Michael's medicine. Michael and Mr. Darling engage in a medicine drinking battle, ending with Mr. Darling putting his medicine in Nana's bowl of milk. In the commotion that follows, Nana is discarded from the nursery and tied in the garden.

With the parents gone, the bedroom goes dark and a small boy and a ball of light enter. Peter Pan has come looking for his shadow. With him is Tinker Bell, his friend who is a fairy.[23] Wendy, wakened by the noise, is interested to see a stranger in her bedroom. Peter, who by now has found his shadow, cannot stick it back on. Wendy resolves the problem by using needle and thread. Peter ran away from home as a baby. He lived with the fairies in Kensington Gardens for a while. Now he lives with the lost boys on an island called Never Land.[24] Peter wants Wendy to come and be their mother, as they have never had one. Happy

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[23] There have been several variations on the exact spelling of Tinker Bell, but I have chosen to use the one in the 1928 printed version of the play.
[24] Just as with Tinker Bell, the spelling of Never Land has varied. Here I have also chosen to use the one in the 1928 edition.

thoughts and fairy dust enables the three Darling children to join Peter and Tinker Bell, flying off into the night. Mr. and Mrs. Darling, arriving back from their dinner engagement, can only watch as their children disappear.

In Act II, in Never Land, the lost boys eagerly await Peter's return. They hear the singing approach of the much dreaded pirates, led by Peter's arch enemy Captain James 'Jas' Hook. The pirates contemplate catching the boys, but Hook decides that it is Peter he is really after. He discloses to one of his trusted men, Smee, that Peter once cut off the Captain's hand in a fight, resulting in him having to wear the hook that has given him his name. The severed hand is now in the belly of a crocodile who liked the taste and has been hunting Hook ever since. Luckily for the Captain, the animal also swallowed a clock. Hook is therefore always listening for the warning of the coming of his second enemy. The sound of a ticking clock is heard, and the pirates flee.

One of the lost boys claims he has seen a great white bird flying over the island. The bird is accompanied by Tinker Bell, who is trying to hurt it. She says that Peter wants the boys to shoot the bird, which they do without question. When it falls to the ground they discover that they have killed a lady. Maybe Peter was bringing her with him to care for them? As Peter arrives they confess that they have shot Wendy. But, she is still breathing and Tinker Bell, who has been rejoicing in her death, is rejected by Peter. The lost boys start to erect a house around Wendy. John and Michael, both forgotten by Peter, arrive and watch in amazement as one of the lost boys, playing doctor, cures their sister. When the house is finished, they all wait in anticipation while Peter knocks on the door. Wendy opens, agrees to be their mother, and they all step into the house to hear the story of Cinderella.

Further on in Act III, Peter and his friends are in the mermaids' lagoon trying to catch a mermaid who is sunning herself on Marooner's Rock. This is the place where captains leave their sailors to die. When the tide is high, the rock is engulfed with water and the sailors

drown. The play in the water is interrupted by the arrival of two of Captain Hook's men. Smee and Starkey have taken Tiger Lily, the daughter of the Indian chief, captive and are planning to abandon her on the rock. Peter, who is a good impersonator, imitates the voice of Hook and demands them to set her free. The two pirates are tricked, release Tiger Lily, and she disappears into the water. The real Hook arrives displeased because he has found out that Peter and the lost boys now have a mother. Smee suggests that they capture Wendy and the boys, and make her their own mother. The Captain discovers that Tiger Lily is gone, and he denies ever having told his companions to let the Indian go. Now in hiding, Peter starts a guessing game with the Captain, and Hook understands that his men have been tricked by his worst enemy. There is a battle in the water, and eventually Hook is again driven away by the ticking of the crocodile. Peter and Wendy now lie fainted on the rock. A mermaid tries to pull Wendy into the water, resulting in Wendy waking up, crying Peter's name. The mermaid disappears and they see that the tide is rising and the rock is getting smaller. Peter, who has been wounded by Hook, can neither fly nor swim, and Wendy is not able to fly on her own. As they ponder their death, a kite, able to carry one of them, comes flying by. Peter decides that Wendy, who is a lady, shall go, and that he shall stay behind. He is saved by a bird's nest floating in the water. Using his shirt as a sail, he turns the nest into a boat and sails away.

In Act IV, we are in Peter's home, which is in a whole beneath the ground. Wendy and the lost boys are enjoying a pretend meal. Peter arrives after a night out hunting. Wendy who has been pretending to play happy family talks to him about it being make-believe. She gets the boys ready for bed, and tells them the story of Mr. and Mrs. Darling and the disappearance of their children. She believes that mothers never forget their children, and when Peter informs her that this is not the case, she decides it is time to go back. Tinker Bell is to fly the Darling children home. Wendy wants to bring the lost boys with her so that they can be adopted. Peter does not want to come.

While they have all been inside the house, the Indians have been guarding it. Suddenly they are attacked by Captain Hook's pirates. The Indians flee and the pirates wait for Peter and his friends to come out. Peter and Wendy say goodbye, as she and the boys are ready to travel. The pirates capture them all, except Peter, and carry them away. Hook now sneaks into Peter's house and, while watching Peter sleep, slips some sort of liquid into a draught that Wendy has prepared earlier. When Peter wakes, the Captain is gone and Tinker Bell tells him about Wendy's capture. She also says that his medicine has been poisoned, and then, to prevent him from taking it, she ingests it herself. She is clearly dying, and can only be saved by Peter's plea to the audience to clap their hands to save her life.

In the final act, Wendy and the boys have been taken aboard Captain Hook's pirate ship. Hook is parading the deck, giving a speech. To save the prisoners form walking the plank, he offers them a position on board, but they all decline. As they are tying Wendy to the mast, the pirates can hear the sound of the crocodile near by. It is actually Peter mimicking it in order to enter the ship. Behind the pirates' backs he unties the prisoners, dons Wendy's cloak and then cries his famous war cry: the sound of a cock. The pirates, ready to throw Wendy overboard, are surprised to see Peter hiding in her cloths. A fight to the death follows, rendering Peter and Hook facing each other for their final battle. Hook, realising that he has lost, jumps ship and gives himself to the crocodile.

In the last part of Act V we are back in the nursery. Mrs. Darling is waiting, keeping the window open for her children's return. Mr. Darling and Nana have traded places, and he is now living in the dog kennel. Suddenly Peter appears at the window. He wants to bar it, so that Wendy will find it shut when she comes back. When he sees Mrs. Darling, he has a strange sensation and wishes to fly away, leaving the window open. The three Darling children appear, sneaking silently into the nursery. Mrs. Darling can hardly believe her eyes

when she realises they are back. Both they and the lost boys are very welcome. At the end, Mrs. Darling agrees that Wendy can return to Never Land once a year for spring cleaning.[25]

Publication history

When *Peter Pan* premiered, somewhat delayed, on the 27th of December 1904, the audience witnessed some of the most challenging special effects ever attempted in the London theatre up until then. The main character of the play, which was to become one of the stars of both that season and seasons to come, was not entirely a novel concoction. Peter was the result of years of inspiration on Barrie's behalf.

Already in 1902 Barrie published a novel titled *The Little White Bird*. A book originally aimed at adults, this was a collection of stories centring on Kensington Gardens. In it, the narrator meets a small boy named David one day he is out walking. The grown-up tells the boy stories of what goes on in the park at night when there is no one there but the fairies. One whole chapter is devoted to the character Barrie chose to call Peter Pan. The name Peter was inspired by one of the Llewelyn Davies boys. Pan was a reference to the forest god Pan, famous for playing pipes and for his sensuality. The chapters relating to Peter explain his background. After running away from home as a small baby, in an attempt to avoid growing up, he now resides on an island in the middle of a river flowing through the park. In real life the island was situated in the Serpentine in Hyde Park in London. Following the success of the play, the stories about Peter was extracted from the book, and published in a separate volume in 1906 entitled *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

The leitmotif of the play and the idea of a boy not being able to grow up, or incapable of neither having nor dealing with grown-up emotions, can be traced even further back. Both *Sentimental Tommy* and the sequel *Tommy and Grizel* contain glimpses of Peter Pan. The

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[25] J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan or the Boy who Would not Grow Up* in *The Plays of J.M.Barrie* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928).

latter story depicts a young couple and their struggle to love one another. Lisa Chaney draws parallels between Tommy and Peter, Tommy's main flaw being his inability to grow up, and as a consequence, of loving Grizel like a man is supposed to love a woman.[26] 'Tommy constantly refers to his inability to progress beyond boyhood, and, while knowing he is no longer a child, over and over again he expresses his urge to return to that ideal state'.[27]

In Barrie's novel the main focus is on Tommy's knowledge of the fact that he is no longer a child, and therefore his childlike behaviour is inappropriate. The idea is that in a world ruled by children, he would be perfect, something which again parallels the kingly status that Peter Pan later experiences in Never Land.

> Poor Tommy! he was still a boy, he was ever a boy, trying to sometimes, as now, to be a man, and always when he looked round he ran back to his boyhood as if he saw it holding out its arms to him and inviting him to come back and play. He was so fond of being a boy that he could not grow up. In younger world, where there were only boys and girls, he might have been a gallant figure.[28]

The main difference between Tommy and Peter is that while Tommy is a boy who cannot grow up, indicating that he wants to and sees the necessity of it, Peter is the boy who will not grow up. His continued childhood state is voluntary. In fact it is Tommy's biggest regret that he cannot be the man he is expected to be. He is clearly aware of the reason why his love life is non-existent. In comparison to the make-believe house that Peter and Wendy set up in Never Land, Peter playing father to Wendy's mother because he feels it is expected, Tommy tries to live up to Grizel's expectations, but fails.

> Tommy trying to become a lover by taking thought, and Grizel not letting on that it could not be done in that way. He was a boy only. She knew that, despite all he had gone through, he was still a boy. And boys cannot love. Oh, is it not cruel to ask a boy to love?[29]

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[26] Lisa Chaney, *Hide-and-Seek with Angels: A Life of J.M. Barrie* (London: Hutchinson, 2005), pp. 160-64, 206-09.
[27] Ibid., p.162.
[28] J.M. Barrie, *Tommy and Grizel* in *The Works of J.M. Barrie* (London: Cassell and Company, 1924), p. 117.

While Tommy is desperately trying to love Grizel in an adult fashion, Peter is searching for someone to take on the role as 'mother'. Chaney goes on to claim that the story of Tommy and Grizel can be seen as a testimony to Barrie's own failing marriage.[30] Her argument is that the hardship of adult life in some ways forces the author to reject reality and create a simpler world based on youth, play and wonder.

In November 1903 Barrie used one of his numerous notebooks to draw an outline for a play he titled *ANON*.[31] This was the start of what today is known as *Peter Pan.* Rehearsals started in late October 1904. The play was directed by Dion Boucicault and his sister, Nina, was cast to play the lead as Peter. The reason was that Charles Frohman, the American producer, insisted that Maude Adams should play in the planned US production. Thus, a woman had to be cast for the British original too. The casting of a woman in the lead role of the boy has since become a tradition which has only recently been abandoned. Barrie kept the script very close and the actors were only presented with each act as it was being rehearsed. This was done both because the writer was anxious about the actors' feelings towards his play, and because he constantly rewrote the story for the duration of the rehearsals. The play consisted of some of the most technically challenging special effects that had been seen on stage in London. A special harness was developed so that the actors would appear weightless during the flying scenes. The fur of Barrie's new dog, Luath, was used as model for the coat of the Darling children's nurse Nana. The veil of secrecy around the production caused much speculation in the press and consequently among the public. This can to some degree be seen as a promotional step taken by Barrie to add to the magic of the final product. On the opening night the audience was eager and expectant. The reviews following the first performance

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[29] Ibid., p. 395.
[30] Chaney, pp. 163-64.
[31] All the information on the original production is based on Andrew Birkin's *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), and Bruce K. Hanson's *The Peter Pan Chronicles: The Nearly 100 Year History of "The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up"* (New York, NY: Birch Line Press, 1993).

established the success.[32] The fame has further been confirmed and developed by the annual revivals up until World War II.

> Peter Pan was the first of the pre-teen heroes: girls wanted to mother him, boys wanted to fight by his side, while the ambiguity of his sex stimulated a confusion of emotional response. The play soon began to attract a hard-core following of matinee fanatics who occupied the front row of the stalls to hurl thimbles at Peter and abuse Hook.[33]

The popularity of the original production and the following enthusiasm for Peter lead to a popular demand for a printed version of the play. Barrie continued to rewrite and perfect the text, and he refused to let it go. The audience's demands were partly responded to with the already mentioned reissuing of the Peter stories from *The Little White Bird.* Hodder and Stoughton published *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* in 1906. The book was supplied fifty illustrations by Arthur Rackman.

For some time Barrie worked on a novel version of the play, and *Peter and Wendy* was finally published simultaneously in London and New York in October 1911, this time with illustrations by F.D. Bedford.

> Like *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, Peter and Wendy* would become a standard children's present for many years to come. They may well have seen the play, but it was through *Peter and Wendy* or abridged versions of the play that most children in the first half of the twentieth century became so familiar with the story of *Peter Pan*. And still Barrie had not allowed publication of the play's text.[34]

As noted in the introduction, it was not until 1928 that the script of the play was published. It was included as a part of Barrie's collected works. With at least three different,

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[32]*The Daily Telegraph* observed that the play was 'so true, so natural, so touching that it brought the audience to the writer's feet and held them captive there'. 'To our taste,' wrote A.B. Walkley in *The Times,* '*Peter Pan* is from beginning to end a thing of pure delight.' Beerbohm Tree's half-brother, Max Beerbohm, paied Barrie a perceptive though somewhat backhanded compliment in *The Saturday Review*: 'undoubtedly , *Peter Pan*, is the best thing Barrie has done – the thing most directly from himself Here, at last, we see his talent in its full maturity; for here he has stripped off from himself the last flimsy remnant of a pretence to maturity.', Birkin, p. 117.

[33] Ibid., p. 118.

[34] Chaney, p. 290.

lasting versions of the story distributed during the author's lifetime, this becomes an opportunity to see him at various developing stages in his career. People who got to know Peter in *The Little White Bird* could get re-acquainted with him through the play, and with the publication of the book, Peter's potential for becoming a part of the canon was established. Since Barrie was still alive while his story was being published it gave him an opportunity to take part in the reception of his work. As the audience and critics made their own assumptions, Barrie could observe what the public thought about his work. When he decided to issue the story as a book, he could either confirm the assumptions or he could set the public straight by telling them what they were supposed to think. If there were certain parts of the play they did not understand he could rectify it with the book.

The Victorians and their children

From the middle of the nineteenth century there had been an increasing focus on children and their role in British society. We see authors like Charles Dickens illustrate questions on child labour and the more general social and economic situation for low income families. Poor families often had to send their children to work under appalling conditions. The industrialisation and the resulting economic growth had an impact on several aspects of society. In addition to the situation at home, the so-called 'state of England question', Britain was expanding her authority, gaining power, creating a worldwide empire. While conditions were still hard for many, economic prosperity led to the rise of the further middle classes. Inspired by Queen Victoria and her emphasis on family values, the family became the idolised social unit. Peter Keating argues that

> The mid-Victorians especially had given the family an almost mystical significance. In so far as any coherent theory lay behind their reverent attitude it focused on the family as a microcosm of the nation, and later the Empire: the family was a potent symbol of unity and selflessness in an age threatened by the newness of industrialism and the

divisiveness of class warfare.[35]

The image of a happy family with mothers taking care of their children, and with working fathers providing for their wives and offspring, became a fixed image. The idea of the doll's house, which Henrik Ibsen so strongly criticised in his play from 1879, was the set standard by the middle of the century.

With the growth of the middle classes, the families now became smaller, creating a parent and child unit. One consequence of the economic developments was that more people could afford to hire help around the house. This again rendered men and women with more free time to spend with their children. We see that the role of the child changes dramatically during this period. This was not due only to the redefinition of the family, but also caused by changes in politics and philosophy. Already in 1833 Parliament passed The Factory Act, limiting the allowed work hours for children. Charities seeing to the welfare of children blossomed. Education was suddenly available to a wider group, resulting in more being able to read and write. The Education Act passed in 1870, made education compulsory and available to all.[36] G.M. Trevelyan argues that 'Enlarged sympathy with children was one of the chief contributions made by the Victorian English to real civilization'[37] This is also established by Jackie Wullschläger, who goes on to claim that 'This sympathy emerged out of a growing sense in the nineteenth century of needs, desires, behaviour and rights which were distinctive to children.'[38] Children were to be considered children with their own individual personality. Before, they had been viewed as small adults or as someone who was not meant

[35] Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 157.
[36] Jackie Wullschläger, *Inventing Wonderland: The Lives of Lewis Carroll, Edward Lear, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame and A.A. Milne* (London: Methuen, 2001), p. 14.
[37] G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London, 1944), p. 545.
[38] Wullschläger, p. 13.

to be seen or heard.[39] The manufacture of toys increased, and there evolved a whole new industry centring on the child and its needs.

The conceptions of the soul of the child were based upon two very different models:

> Studies of Victorian childhood typically discuss evangelicals' and romantics' conflicting constructions of the child. The evangelical view was that children were tainted by original sin and must be closely controlled in order to save their souls. Those influenced by Rousseau subscribed to a more romantic view of childhood and saw children as innocent and spontaneous. Most scholars agree that evangelical ideology held firmer sway in the early years of the century while the romantic gradually gained influence, yet both existed at the same time to varying degrees.[40]

In the early Victorian times theological ideas dominated childrearing. There were actually two sets of views circulating at the same time. One was of the child as a pure, innocent, good being, while the other claimed it to be someone who was originally tainted and who needed to be kept in line and monitored closely. It was the idea of the child as selfish and potentially evil that became the leading image. The adult's job and responsibility was to train the children and to guide them on the right track. The goal was to transform them from irresponsible beings into rational, thinking members of society.

> Treated as a small adult, the child was to be trained out of his childish ways into the moral and rational perfection of regulated manhood. The child was the *tabula rasa* upon which, through education, sensation could work its beneficent influence.[41]

As a reaction to enlightenment and industrialisation, the influence of the Romantic Movement very much decided the late Victorian view of children. It is also this view which has come to be associated with the period. In 1762 the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote *Émile, ou De l'Education*, a book in which he expressed the thought of the child as an

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[39] The idea that children were small adults is reflected in the art of the time. In paintings they are usually depicted with grown-up faces and dressed in clothes copied from adults.
[40] Christine Sutphin, 'Victorian Childhood. Reading Beyond the 'Innocent Title': Home Thoughts and Home Scenes', in *Children's Literature: New Approaches*, ed. by Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p. 54.
[41] Peter Coveney, *The Image of Childhood. The Individual and Society: a Study of the Theme in English Literature* (London: Penguin, 1967), pp. 40-41.

innocent.[42] The opening line of the book defines the idea that man is by nature good and that forces in society are the deciding factors in human development.[43] In Britain, children became the symbol of the purity that is inherent in all. The child was the image of man before he became corrupted by society. In the adults search for the new ideal of innocence they found that it could be reached, if not literally, through their children. This resulted in a form of cult based in the worship of childhood.

In the wake of this new ideal came the blossoming of a new type of literature directed at children. For the first time children became main characters in books written for their own amusement. To some degree it is possible to argue that most of the literature produced during 'the golden age of children's literature', was an expression of the authors' need to celebrate or come to terms with their own personal demons. It is undisputable that the books written during this period have set standards within the genre. Most of these stories are now classified as a separate canon within Western literature. The publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 is deemed to be the start of the Golden Age. One of the similarities that we find when looking at these early children's writers is the fact that many of them drew inspiration from real life. Their books are often inspired be their own childhood memories or by children in close proximity to them. Milne, who was a huge admirer of Barrie long before they met, consulted him on several occasions. Like Barrie, Milne also used parts of his own family story and created one of the most iconic figures in children's literature: Winnie-the-Pooh.[44]

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[42] *Emile, or on Education* was originally a philosophical quest to establish the nature of man. The book portrays man's relationship to and development in society. Rousseau is most famous for the concept of 'the noble savage', a phrase he himself never used. The idea is that man is originally pure and innocent, and that it is the influence of society that corrupts his soul.

[43] 'God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil', Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile* (London: Everyman, 1993), p. 5.

[44] In 1905 Milne wrote to H.G. Wells saying: 'Have you seen *Peter Pan*? It's too wonderful to live. My heroes in real life are J.M. Barrie and the editor of the *Sheffield Independent*.', Ann Thwaite, *A.A. Milne: His Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p. 116. The comment on the editor of the *Sheffield Independent* is in connection with a bad review he had given Milne's latest book. The author's admiration for Barrie was expressed on several occasions. There is a notable similarity between the two writers. They both drew inspiration

At the *fin de siècle* the fascination with childhood and youth had somewhat turned and now circled around the ideal of the young boy.

> The tone of such an emphasis on childhood prepared the way for the view, which gained ground in late Victorian England, that only youth mattered. It was an idea given voice by E.A. Housman, in the youthful martyrs of *A Shropshire Lad,* 'the lads who will die in their glory and never be old', and by Oscar Wilde in his depiction of Dorian Gray.[45]

With his story about Dorian Gray, where Gray stays young while his portrait ages, Oscar Wilde put into words the ideal of the time: everlasting youth. As a contrast to the beautiful youth depicted by Wilde, come the heroic, adventurous young men who were central in another form of fiction. We see this in the popularity of the adventure stories that were published at that time. In books like *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson and *King Salomon's Mines* (1885) by Henry Rider Haggard, there is, amongst other things, a strong emphasis on the young hero. It is well known that Barrie was a huge admirer of Stevenson, and in the biography of his mother he dedicated a whole chapter to the author. Barrie felt that Stevenson 'was the spirit of boyhood tugging at the skirts of this old world of ours and compelling it to come back and play.'[46]

A tradition for fairies

The fairy tradition was strongly embedded in traditional English culture. To use non-realistic elements such as fairies and flying children, was not a novelty conjured up by Barrie. The interest in other worlds and their respective inhabitants had already been re-established by the Romantics and embraced by the Victorians. Charlotte Gere says that 'as modern industrial progress engulfed the English countryside, the Victorians embraced belief in fairies as a

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from children they saw every day, created two of the most iconic figures in popular culture, which again have both been immortalised by the efforts of Disney.

[45] Wullschläger, p. 27.

[46] J.M. Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy: By Her Son* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), pp. 114 – 15.

reaction to the disenchantment of the world'.[47]The belief in fairies can be traced far back, and the elaborate genealogies of the different types of fairies have been topics for several books. This type of folklore is especially strong in Scotland and Wales. Barrie, being from Scotland, most certainly knew about the lives and ways of the elfin people.[48]

> It was with their resurfacing at the end of the eighteenth century, in part through the offices of the poets and antiquaries among the English romantics, that the systematic, analytical study of their types, traits, and origins really began. For it is in English romanticism, in the attitudes of its adherents to the elfin peoples and their worlds, that the roots of the Victorian fairy fascination lie.[49]

Several contemporary writers and researchers of folklore contributed to the re-emergence of the fairies. People like Thomas Crofton Crocker, Thomas Keightley, Allan Cunningham and James Hogg were all central in the popularisation of the topic. The one who has come to have the greatest importance in the distribution of research and belief, according to scholars, is Sir Walter Scott. Being a Scotsman, he had first-hand access to the folklore of his home grounds. He thoroughly researched the field and consequently published several studies on the background of fairies.

> Scott's theories about the origins and nature of the fairies permeated his fictions and thus gained wider currency through the enormous popularity of his poems and novels.[50]

The common factor among all these writers was that they at one point actually believed in the existence of the elfin people. Scott had believed in fairies as a child, and therefore had a

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[47] Charlotte Gere, 'In Fairyland' in *Victorian Fairy Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997), p. 63.
[48] In her book Lisa Chaney describes Pamela Maude, whose father starred in Barrie's plays, recollecting how Barrie used to amuse them with tales of fairies. 'Mr. Barrie talked a great deal about cricket and wanted Margery to like it and be boyish, but the next moment he was telling us about fairies as though he knew all about them. In the evening Mr. Barrie held out a hand to each of us in silence, and we slipped our own hand into his and walked, still silently, into the beech wood. One evening we saw a pea-pod lying in the hollow of a great tree trunk and we brought it to Mr. Barrie. There inside was a tiny letter, folded inside the pod, that a fairy had written. Mr. Barrie said he could read fairy writing and read it to us. We received several more, in pea-pods, before the end of our visit', Chaney, pp. 121-22.
[49] Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 9-10.
[50] Ibid., p. 11.

predisposition when an interest in folklore re-emerged. James Hogg claimed that one of the reasons for collecting fairy lore was that the fairies were now leaving the country due to industrialism and urbanisation.

It is important to differentiate between the actual belief in the existence of elfin peoples and the artistic and cultural 'worship' that grew out of the Romantic period. At one end, as means of authentication, the origin of other peoples was being explained through the new social sciences, religion and other forms of scholarship. At the other end were accounts of people's experience with the other world. Amongst the famous is the story of Rev. Robert Kirk elaborating on his encounters with the elves.[51] The extensive and thorough publications that came out, also spurred a further interest, and fairies became a favourite theme in various forms of art. In painting, the topic had its peak between 1840 and 1870.[52] On stage the tradition goes far back, but Shakespeare stands out as one of the playwrights who firmly established fairies as characters. When he created *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594), he ensured the still continuing revival and reinterpretation of the fairy play as a subgenre. The genre developed further, presenting the audience with songs, melodies and dancing as well as acting. Over time this established a new tradition within the theatre.

> The close and fruitful interchange between fairy themes
> and the British stage which had begun with the alchemy
> of Shakespeare's words, had taken a new direction, combining
> the theatrical arts of illusionism with music, song and dance.[53]

This type of theatre culminated in the art of the pantomime, which was to have a huge influence on and for a time dominate much of British theatre. Pantomimes were usually put

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[51] Between 1688 and 1692 Rev. Robert Kirk, a Scottish minister, wrote a series of documents known as *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Faeries.* This was a detailed account of his meetings and experiences with the fairies, see John Matthews, *The Secret Lives of Elves and Faeries: From the Private Journal of the Rev. Robert Kirk* (London: Godsfield Press, 2005).
[52] Jeremy Maas, 'Victorian Fairy Painting', in *Victorian Fairy Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997), p. 11.
[53] Lionel Lambourne, 'Fairies and the Stage', in *Victorian Fairy Painting* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1997), p. 47.

on in December, and fairies always played a vital part in the production. In *Peter Pan*, Barrie is heavily indebted to this type of theatre.

Already as far back as *The Canterbury Tales*, fairies have had their part in fiction. People like King James, John Milton (*Paradise Lost*) and Alexander Pope ('The Rape of the Lock') have all written about the subject. Many of the tales, as well as being stories of elves living in close contact with nature, were also often tragic renderings of love lost, bewitchment and secret identities, something which triggered the mind of the Romantic poets. It is possible to see the emphasis on fairies in connection with the worship of childhood and innocence. Andrew Lang, who wrote a series of illustrated fairy books, commented on the blossoming interest in fairy tales, saying that 'the children to whom and for whom they were told represent the young age of man'.[54]

> Not only was he seeing such lore as "the uncontaminated record of our cultural infancy" and creating an analogy between children and "primitive" peoples, but he was assuming that, through the lore, the child had direct access to the prehistoric past – that childhood actually provided entry to a primitive or lost state and could safely restore this world to adults.[55]

The acquaintance with French and German folklore may have helped strengthen the general interest in a British folk heritage. The Brothers Grimm first appeared on the English market in 1823, and in 1846 Hans Christian Andersen was also made available to the British readers.[56] In a way these publications helped legitimise an oral tradition, which had existed in England for centuries, and the idea of people interacting with fairies was no longer preposterous. Before, the fairy tales had been seen as unfit because they where incompatible with Christian values and therefore not useful for instruction (as much of the earlier literature written for

[54] Silver, p. 5.
[55] Ibid., p. 5.
[56] Wullschläger, pp. 100-101.

children was intended as).[57] In one of her books, Katharine Briggs writes about the fairies' place in literature, saying that 'The literary treatment of fairies has been beset with the dangers of whimsicality ever since the poets ceased to believe in them.'[58] When writing about Barrie's other work, she also touches upon some of the aspects of Peter Pan that make him appealing.

> The fairy chapters of *The Little White Bird* are the best part of the book. They have a good many twists and inventions about them, and yet on the whole they give a convincing picture of fairy character. Lob in *Dear Brutus* is perhaps the best conceived and carried out of Barrie's fairy people. He has the great age of the fairy changelings, who have seen the acorn before the oak. He is more convincing than Peter Pan in having an old age that has never been manhood. He has the fairy tricksiness and the fairy insights.[59]

One of Barrie's talents was to write credibly about fairies. Even though Briggs says that Lob is a more developed character, Peter Pan still possesses the playfulness and cunningness of a trickster. The basis of the character is the balance between old age and youthfulness. One thing which it is important to remember, and which is also made clear to the audience, is that Peter is not a real fairy but a 'lost boy' by choice. He has been living for so long among the fairy people that he has adapted their traits and behaviour. The idea planted in the audience was that he transcends time and in a way has become an everlasting spirit.

In *The little White Bird* Barrie had already developed a fairy mythology of his own, explaining the existence of fairies as caused by humans. 'When the first baby laughed for the first time, his laugh broke into a million pieces, and they all went skipping about. That was the beginning of fairies.'[60] Later, in *Peter Pan,* he says that the fairies are dying because people do not believe in them anymore. When Tinker Bell is dying, it is only the audience's belief, expressed through clapping, that can save her. With this Barrie brings the fairies out of

[57] Ibid., p. 98. See also Katharine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 224-26.
[58] Briggs, p. 248.
[59] Ibid., p. 251.
[60] J.M. Barrie, *The Little White Bird, The Works of J.M. Barrie* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), p. 151.

an untouchable ethereal existence, and places them very much in reality. Silver, in an attempt to show that the importance of fairies in children's stories removed them from their original place in folklore, claims that

> J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* helped to popularize them out of existence. Creating an early twentieth-century fairy cult for children, it made "keeping Tinkerbell alive by clapping" the tenet of a new religion. The idea of saving the fairies from extinction through belief is not at all alien to folklore, but in *Peter Pan* the transaction shifts the power entirely from the supernatural to mortals.[61]

Barrie's message here is that belief is a choice, and that if you believe, the incredible becomes possible. The author himself was never a believer, and took a firm stand against such things as mysticism and occultism.

The introduction and growing importance of fairies in children's literature in many ways changed the views people had on them. The illustrations usually accompanying the stories were often picturesque and romantic, showing little people in flowing pastel gowns. In many cases they were depicted as small with childlike qualities. It has been said that the idolisation and removal of them from their original adult context was the start of the disenchantment of fairy belief.[62] With the emergency of children's literature, the fairies became a fantastic element connected with innocence and purity.

The fairy belief spurred and reawakened other tendencies in society too. For many the interest in mythology and spiritualism led to a fascination with theosophy and occultism. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was a good friend of Barrie as well as a fellow Scotsman, was one of the well-known occultists of the time. Though Briggs, in the passage above, claims that writers stopped believing in fairies, the case of the Cottingley fairies is evidence to the contrary. Conan Doyle published *The Coming of the Fairies*, a book which in detail depicted

[61] Silver, p. 188.
[62] Ibid., p. 185.

his firsthand experience with the now famous case from 1917.[63] In the introduction to his book he underlines that he has no intention of trying to convince the non-believers but also that sceptics should be open to the possibility that what happened was actually for real. The fairy encounter was later revealed as a hoax, but one of the points in the authentication of this case was that only the young girls who had actually photographed the fairies could see them. It was their purity and innocence that enabled them to experience wonder. With this the existence of the elfin people again became a phenomenon associated with the fantasy of children thus removing the belief and tradition further away from their origination.[64]

The themes of *Peter Pan*

Because of Barrie's reputation as a comedy writer and sentimentalist, *Peter Pan* was originally viewed as a fun fairy play, celebrating the joy and possibilities of youth. But, when looking beyond this perspective, it is possible to trace many important themes which are connected to other parts of the author's works. Barrie took inspiration from the people he met and from his personal experiences. Several central themes from his life can be read into his work. The impact of the author's biography on the play will be further discussed in Chapter Three of this text. In this part I will concentrate on the themes apparent in the text itself, and on what parts of the play the original audience focused on. Chaney says that

> A far more radical and experimental playwright than many recognised, in his work Barrie was conscious of his aims. Yet in this play he was putting forward ideas more complex and developed than any he had so far presented. At one level the essential themes of his play came from so deep inside his psyche, he would have found it almost impossible fully to

[63] In 1917 the two cousins Frances and Elise took pictures of each other playing with the fairies that lived in the woods near their home. In a letter to Conan Doyle in May 1920, Miss Scatcherd wrote of Miss Gardner's tale: 'He has got into touch with a family in Bradford where the little girl, Elsie, and her cousin, Frances, constantly go into the woods and play with the fairies... Some little time ago, Elsie said she wanted to photograph them, and begged her father to lend his camera.... Frances 'ticed' them, as they call it, and Elsie stood ready with the camera.... It was a long time before the father would develop the photo, but at last he did, and to his utter amazement the four sweet little figures came out beautifully!' Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), p. 11.

[64] Silver, p. 189.

explain their derivation.[65]

When interpreting the play, one sees how the multilayered main character could enthral an audience originally made up of adults. On first glance, the text might give the impression of being an adventure story written for children, but it is important to remember that Barrie was writing for an experienced theatre crowd and a potentially critical audience.

On the surface, Peter himself is very much in correspondence with the ideal of the time. He is the selfproclaimed embodiment of youth. When Hook asks 'who and what art thou?' (141), Peter answers resolutely 'I'm youth, I'm joy' (141). The character initially symbolises the youthful spirit who is not burdened by the responsibility or the toil that comes with an adult's life. When he ran away form his parents as a small child, he made a conscious choice not to grow up. When Wendy asks him whether he wants to come back to her world, Peter says 'I just want always to be a little boy and to have fun' (111). He knows that going back involves growing up. From the reviews at the time of the premier, it is evident that the play inspired childlike wonder in the critics. *The Bookman* wrote 'Like all masterpieces of art it is a revelation and an incarnation of things eternal. We see not fictitious adventures for boys, but the actual adventures of the soul of Boyhood.'[66]

The character not only draws inspiration from the preoccupation with childhood already inherent in the audience. After having lived a make-believe life among fairies for so long, his human traits are disappearing. In the text we see clear parallels to the god Pan. Not only is Peter's second name Pan, but he also lives in the forest and plays pipes. The characteristic trickster personality of the fairies in British tradition is apparent in the way he always makes fun of others, trying to misguide them. By giving his character a name already connected with history and fairy lore, Barrie created a context for Peter, indirectly making him part of a larger belief system beyond the theatre. Humphrey Carpenter notes that

[65] Chaney, p. 218.
[66] Ibid., p. 213.

> He is at the same time a child himself and a child's dream-figure, the archetypal hero both of magical fairy tale and adventure story. He seems not just the invention of one writer, but a character from mythology.[67]

Because the character had already been introduced in *The Little White Bird*, many among the first audience would know of Peter and his background.[68] He was to an extent familiar.

> Barrie's choice of 'Pan' as Peter's second name was, to say the least, ingenious. It implies that Peter is a figure of classical mythology. Barrie cleverly presents his brand new creation as being something of indescribable antiquity and children first reading of hearing about Peter Pan take on board the notion that he is a mythological figure which, of course, he nowadays almost is, since today's grandparents really did first encounter him in their childhood.[69]

Peter has existed for so long in limbo between reality and fantasy that he has no sense of time, which is symbolised by his forgetfulness. He is also a highly skilled imitator and can take on the persona of anyone he wants. This is illustrated in Act III on Marooner's Rock, where his imitation of Captain Hook is so good that even the pirates themselves are fooled. He lives in the moment and has no understanding of the concept of cause and effect. To him everything is a game of make-believe. When looking beyond the initial romantic reception of the character, we find a person who is actually quite selfish and narcissistic. Peter shows little concern for other people's feelings and is always making choices which fit his own comforts and interests. He is preoccupied with being the hero of every adventure, and always has to be the centre of attention. Wendy at one point is concerned that 'It is so queer that the stories you like best

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[67] Humphrey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 180.

[68] 'If you ask your mother whether she knew about Peter Pan when she was a little girl, she will say, 'Why, of course I did, child'; and if you ask her whether he rode on a goat in those days, she will say, 'What a foolish question to ask; certainly he did.' Then if you ask your grandmother whether she knew about Peter Pan when she was a girl, she also says, 'Why, of course I did, child,' but if you ask her whether he rode on a goat in those days, she says she never heard of his having a goat. Perhaps she has forgotten, just as she sometimes forgets your name and calls you Mildred, which is your mother's name. Still, she could hardly forget such an important thing as the goat. Therefore there was no goat when your grandmother was a little girl. This shows that, in telling the story of Peter Pan, to begin with the goat (as most people do) is as silly as to put on your jacket before your vest. Of course, it also shows that Peter is ever so old, but he is really always the same age, so that does not matter in the least.' *The Little White Bird*, p. 122. This shows that already here Barrie was creating a mythology around the character, claiming him to be someone who is present in every child's life.

[69] Carpenter, p. 181.

should be the ones about yourself' (159). As Peter is someone who lives outside reality, he cannot relate to the feelings of real people. This is constantly played upon in his inability to understand Wendy's romantic approaches, mistaking them for motherly love. The question of Peter's sexuality will be elaborated on below in the part dealing with what was cut from the original production.

In one way it is possible to see the play as Barrie's lamentation on the passing of time, indirectly telling the audience that the idea of the eternal innocence of childhood is only possible to maintain through fantasy. When Peter chose to stay a child forever, he also rejected the concept of time. As this is not possible in the world which real people inhabit, he went to Never Land where time is not relevant. But even in the Never Land we are reminded that time is not escapable. This is represented by the character of Captain Hook. On the one hand, he is constantly fighting youth, personified by Peter, hating it because it is a state he can never return to. On the other hand, he is aware of the presence of time, represented by the sound of the ticking clock. He is continuously reminded that the end is nearing. In the final battle in Act V, youth concurs old age as Hook dives to his death in the jaws of the crocodile. By Wendy's and the boys' return home, the audience is reminded that this is only possible in a land that does not exist. In the real world, time is very much a factor.

Traditionally the role of Captain Hook and Mr. Darling is alternated by the same actor. Whether this was for budgetary reasons or purposely designed by Barrie is unclear.[70] It does add to the thematic depth of the story. In the real world, Mr. Darling symbolises the working man of the new middle class. He is part of the machinery that keeps society stable. The stage directions reveal that Mr. Darling is a work ant. 'In the City where he sits on a stool all day, as fixed as a postage stamp, he is like all the others on stools that you recognise him not by his face but by his stool'(11). This is a parallel to the situation in the Never Land where Hook is a

[70] 'Seymour Hicks had originally been set to play Mr. Darling and Captain Hook, but when his wife Ellaline Terriss became unavailable for Wendy, Barrie lost interest in Hicks and gave Gerald (du Maurier) the twin roles instead.', Birkin, p. 109.

symbol of the corporate man who has been corrupted by money and power. Here, Barrie depicts what happens when the conformity of society and the responsibilities that come with adulthood oppress and remove the childlike innocence inherent in everybody. In Mr. Darling there is still some trace of that state since he is able to enjoy playing with his children. In Hook all innocence is gone, and what is left is a cold, unfeeling man. In the stage directions of Act II it is said that Hook has a public school background. This might be Barrie stabbing at a system which turns out, on the surface, fully conformist English gentlemen.

One of the contributing factors to the popularity of the play was the effort shown by the actors portraying the different characters. To Barrie it was important that Captain Hook was depicted as a real pirate and not a caricature. The evolvement of Captain Hook was much due to the actor Gerald du Maurier who set the standards for every actor following in his footsteps. Du Maurier seems to have made a huge impression on the children in the audience. Wullschläger says that 'In the first performances, Gerald du Maurier, the Llewelyn Davies Boys' actor-uncle, played him so compellingly that children were hauled screaming from the theatre.'[71] Author Daphne du Maurier, in her portrait of her father, wrote that he was Hook and that it was the genius of both Barrie and her father that made the character come alive.[72]

The most protruding themes in this story might be the concept of belief. It questions the belief in fairies and by extension fantasy and imagination. It also discusses the belief in oneself and one's own childlike qualities. Both fairies and Never Land only exist as long as someone believes in them. In the first act Peter tells Wendy that almost all the fairies are dead because people do not believe in them anymore. As already mentioned, Silver argues that Barrie, by popularizing fairy belief, contributed to its downfall. Barrie says, in this play, that

[71] Wullschläger, pp. 129-30.
[72] 'Gerald *was* Hook; he was no dummy dressed from Simmons' in a Clarkson wig, ranting and roaring about the stage, a grotesque figure whom the modern child finds a little comic. He was a tragic and rather ghastly creation who knew no peace, and whose soul was in torment; a dark shadow; a sinister dream; a bogey of fear who lives perpetually in the grey recesses of every small boys mind. All boys had their Hooks, as Barrie knew; he was the phantom who came by night and stole his way into their murky reams. And, because he had imagination and a spark of genius, Gerald made him alive', Daphne du Maurier, in Birkin, p. 110.

existence is purely due to people's belief, and that, as one gets older that belief vanishes. At the end of Act IV the author displays his genius. At this point Tinker Bell has drunk Peter's poisoned medicine and is now dying right before the eyes of the audience. Here, Peter utters the words that have become one of the most famous lines of the play:

> Her light is growing faint, and if it goes out, that means she is dead! Her voice is so low I can scarcely tell what she is saying. She says – she says she thinks she could get well again if children believed in fairies! (He rises and throws out his arms he knows not to whom, perhaps to the boys and girls of whom he is not one) Do you believe in fairies? Say quick that you believe! If you believe, clap your hands! (119)

With this line Barrie places all his trust in the audience. At the premier he had agreed with the orchestra that if none in the audience clapped they would start. He need not have worried, because at that point the audience was so griped by the story that they instantly threw their hands together to prevent Tinker Bell's imminent death. Chaney says that the roar of assent was so powerful that Nina Boucicault, who played Peter, was reduced to tears.[73] In this moment Barrie shows that childhood beliefs lie dormant in everyone, they just have to be awakened. Everyone has seen Never Land although they know it is pretend, they have seen the Darling children fly, though it is not possible, and now they see it as completely plausible that their clapping can save the small, perishing fairy. Chaney goes on to note how Barrie in some way removed the boundaries between adult and child:

> Rather than drawing out the distinctions between adults and children, in *Peter Pan* Barrie blurred them and encouraged a mutual suspension of belief, an abandonment of reality. The difference here between adult and child would only be in what kind of reality was being abandoned.[74]

Even though the play centres heavily on Peter's character, there is one featured theme that is reflected in many parts of Barrie's work. He was always a writer of strong female

[73] Chaney, p. 230.
[74] Ibid.

characters. In *Peter Pan* the women are all very capable individuals. In Act I when Peter tells Wendy about the lost boys, he also makes a remark about the cleverness of small girls.

> WENDY. Where do you live now?
> PETER. With the lost boys.
> WENDY. Who are they?
> PETER.They are the children who fall out of their prams when the nurse is looking the other way. If they are not claimed in seven days they are sent far away to the Never Land. I'm captain.
> WENDY. What fun it must be.
> PETER. (craftily) Yes, but we are rather lonely. You see, Wendy, we have no female companionship.
> WENDY. Are none of the other children girls?
> PETER. Oh no; girls, you know, are much too clever to fall out of their prams.
> WENDY. Peter, it is perfectly lovely the way you talk about girls. John there just despises us. (34-35)

This in a way sums up the female characters of the play. They are all very sensible. Even in Never Land, Wendy is painfully aware of the fact that it is only make-believe. Mrs. Darling is in many ways the head of the family, although her husband is the breadwinner. In reality, Mrs. Darling has four children, Mr. Darling taking on the role of the fourth one when his wife, in Act I, has to help him tie the tie around his neck. This is also elaborated on when father and son show similar aversions to taking their medicine. When the children go missing, their father feels so inadequate that he takes to living in the dog kennel. It was his childish games that removed Nana from the nursery, and had she been there the children would never have disappeared. Wendy is a resourceful young lady, like her mother. She shows practicality when it is needed, solving the problem with Peter's shadow by sowing it back on. And in Never Land she accepts and takes on the role of mother because she understands that this is what is needed. The whole aspect of mothering also ties in with the fact that Wendy is attracted to Peter in a more amorous way.

The question of Peter's sexuality has always been thematised in interpretation. The initial impression is that the character is portrayed as sexless and as only a little boy. It

becomes clear, though, that Wendy, Tinker Bell and even Tiger Lily see beyond the child. Maureen Duffy claims that the story is ‘quite simply about sex or more precisely about infantile sexuality and sexual curiosity’.[75] Wendy is growing older and her budding sexuality makes her view Peter as a possible partner. It is not the adventures in Never Land that intrigue her, but the possibility of staying with Peter. She is in a state between innocence and adulthood, starting to understand the roles of men and women. This is evident in her whish to and attempt at creating a family with Peter and the boys. Barrie creates humorous situations in the scenes between Wendy and Peter where he misunderstands her advances. When Wendy offers Peter a kiss in the first act, he does not know the meaning of the word and holds out his hand as if to receive something. Wendy, not wanting to hurt his feelings, hands him her thimble. Peter later returns the kiss by giving her an acorn button pulled from his cloths. In these scenes there is also a sense of sadness in Wendy’s childish attempts to woo Peter. It adds to the theme that the god the character gets his name from is a sexual creature in fairy lore. To the sexually repressed Victorians, the underlying sexual play between the characters would be highly visible. The fact that Peter is traditionally portrayed by an actress, creates a situation where the Wendy character’s sexual advances are in fact towards a woman dressed as a man, adding to the sexual ambiguity of the play. The sexual tension was initially a more obvious part of the action. In the Oxford’s World Classics edition of the play, Peter Hollindale describes how explicit lines on sexuality included in the manuscript version of the play were cut from the final production version.[76] This was partly due to the author’s intention of angling it towards a child audience. Another point is that openly sexual references would never have passed with the censorship of the theatre at the time. In the scene mentioned by Hollindale, the advances made by Tiger Lily towards Peter are quite explicit. In the end the

[75] Maureen Duffy, *The Erotic World of Faery* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), p. 305.
[76] Peter Hollindale, introduction in J.M. Barrie, *The Admirable Crichto,n Peter Pan When Wendy Grew Up, What Every Woman Knows, Mary Rose*, ed. by Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. xi-xii.

role of Tiger Lily was cut down and Wendy emerged as the leading female character. Another cut scene registered by the Lord Chamberlain's Office in 1905, accentuates the original play on male and female sexuality.[77] In this scene with the mermaid, Peter displays a larger awareness of the situation and plays up to her advances, thus making the theme more overt. This gives an impression of Barrie's original idea being somewhat different than the final result.

In a famous study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's literary reputation, Jane Tompkins discusses canonisation and argues that the power structures in society are vital factors in deciding whether a work or an author becomes part of a specific canon.[78] She argues that Nathaniel Hawthorne's rise to fame cannot be credited solely to the excellence of his writing, but was also due to the influence of his contemporaries, who recognised his work. Tompkins goes on to say that 'the literary works that now make up the canon do so because the groups that have an investment in them are culturally the most influential'.[79] Even though her study discusses Hawthorne, I believe the arguments are equally applicably to Barrie's situation. As a part of the reception of Peter Pan it is important to realise that the circle of Barrie's friends and acquaintances might have had an influence on his fame and recognition. Some of the most trusted and acknowledged critics of the time gave him credibility through their reviews of his plays. By publicly regaling his abilities as a writer, they helped position him within literary circles. The work done from within the circle of critics made him more accessible and gave him a higher cultural status. Because of the popularity of the story, the publisher also saw the economic gain in reprinting the different versions of it. The continued reissuing also contributed to the extended fame of the character. In retrospect it is an interesting note that the work rather than the author has become part of the canon. It is also arguable that the fame of

[77] See Appendix.
[78] Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: the Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).
[79] Ibid., p. 5.

the character at one point much depended on the fame of the author. At the time, theatre goers would have attended a play written by Barrie due to his reputation as a playwright. It was the fame of the author that that appealed to the audience, and the story of the play may originally have been a secondary contributing factor.

Taking all these cultural aspects into consideration, *Peter Pan* seems to have appeared at exactly the right time. The cultural climate in society made the creation of the character easier, and the continuing distribution of new and rewritten versions of the story, kept him alive among the audience. By 1911 the play had become part of the Christmas tradition in England, and especially in London. As a result the story was only available to the public at certain times of the year. With the publication of *Peter and Wendy*, the story became available to a larger audience. It was more widely spread and could be appropriated by more than one layer of society. Now anyone who wanted to could get to know Peter. Though some of the enchantment and mystery of the stage disappeared, the character remained alive in the mind of the public.

2 THE DISNEY INFLUENCE

The combination of Barrie's popularity in his own time, Peter Pan's introduction into the canon of children's literature, and the author's use of contemporary, culturally recognisable themes in the story were all vital in the development and fame of the character. This and the early commercialisation of the story soon contributed to establishing Peter as a household name. The stories parents choose to share with their children are usually the ones they where told and loved when they were little. Since the audience has made Peter part of their childhood experience, they often continue the tradition by transferring their childhood recollections to their children, making them their children's memories too. This does not mean that the children do not make the story their own and develop their own interpretations.

The continued interest in the character may partly be because of its transition from literature into other genres and fields. Some texts live many lives. One can argue that a text is never stable. Different readings give different interpretations, depending on external circumstances such as time, place, predisposition and level of understanding. In some cases, parts of a text is appropriated and transferred, given new meaning in different fields than what it was originally designed for. We see that this type of change has happened to the Peter Pan character. The now easily recognisable figure has come to have a meaning of his own. The figure itself has become more famous than the original story. Not only has Peter been adapted and reintroduced through films and musicals. In America his image has also been used for promoting such things as peanut butter.

In 1983 psychologist Dan Kiley, after making a great number of case studies, published *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up*.[80] In this book he establishes the behavioural pattern of a type of men with certain characteristics in common.

[80] Published in New York by Dodd Mead in 1983.

They are identified by a reluctance to accept responsibility, and a stern refusal to grow up. Their behaviour takes on different forms during different stages of life, but is always in some form grounded in these two main patterns. Dr. Kiley found the characteristics so much in coherence with a certain literary character that he called his discovery the Peter Pan Syndrome. The term is now well-established within medical discourse. The example here is evidence of the strong influence that Peter Pan has had on parts of culture that are not primarily literary. The character is by now so fixed that he is immediately recognisable in large parts of the world. In a way Peter Pan has become an archetype with easily identifiable characteristics.

Although there have been countless versions of the story published over the years, the most influential and defining interpretation, besides the original production, is the one made by Disney in the animated feature film from 1953. Because most people's knowledge of Peter is connected with either this film or Disney in general, it is interesting to see what has happened to the story and the character. In this chapter I will elaborate on Walt Disney's personal relationship with the character, something which was a decisive factor when he chose to make the story into an animated film. I will then further investigate the importance Disney, as a company, has had in Western culture, concentrating on animation and ideology. In the next part I will look at Disney's interpretation of the plot, and what changes to the story this might have resulted in. As with Barrie's original story from 1904, it is possible to see the social and political ideas of the American 1950's reflected in this film. I will try to illustrate this and show how this might have changed the initial plotline. At the end of this chapter I am going to try and see whether Peter Pan's popularity can be ascribed to some larger social currents that are universal and do not depend on background and social connection.

Walt and Peter

In 1905 producer Charles Frohman took the play to America, and much thanks to his enthusiasm and Maud Adams' astonishing performance as Peter, it was as huge a success as it had been in England. One interesting aspect in the history of Peter Pan in the US is the fact that it, in addition to being continuously revived over the years, was taken on tour very early on, thus making it accessible to a provincial audience that would not normally have been able to see it.

On one of these tours, the play was attended by a then very young Walter Elias Disney. In the article 'Why I Made *Peter Pan'* Disney gives a personal account of why it was so important to him to make the story into a film.[81] Already from a very young age Walter was made familiar with the magic of fairy tales. His grandmother used to tell the Disney children stories. Walt's personal favourites were the ones of Snow White and Peter Pan. When one day a poster announced that a touring company was playing *Peter Pan* in a nearby town, Walt and his brother saved money to buy tickets. In his article, Disney says that the magical adventure and the highly inventive use of special effects made a lasting impression on him. The image that would stay with him the longest was that of Peter flying through the air. Soon after the brothers had seen the performance, the play was chosen as the school-play at Walter's school, and he was picked to play Peter. It is apparent that the story was important to Disney, and it is interesting to see how the animator himself was part of an early reception of it. Its significance to him lay in the fact that he at some stage had the role of both audience and actor.

In 1939, two years after the author's death, Disney bought the film rights to Barrie's story. From the start he was adamant to do the original play justice. He wanted to convey the inherent magic of the story, and as he says in his article, 'you do not create magic to order'.

[81] The article, which it has been impossible for me to find in any published form, was originally printed in April 1953 in Brief Magazine. In a documentary included in the 2007 DVD re-release of *Peter Pan*, there is a detailed description of the contents of the published text. My references to the article are based on this documentary.

Disney felt that the media of animation was the right form in which to make the ideas of Barrie believable. Instead of suspending actors from hanging wires, they could detach Peter and have him fly anywhere uninhibited from any form of restraints. Instead of portraying Tinker Bell in the way of a bouncing light, there was a possibility to make her into a real character, making her more of an individual person, displaying her character traits in a more accurate manner.[82] The preliminary production preparations started in 1947. To maintain a precise approach to the play, Disney used Barrie's original production notes when planning his animation. The aim was to display the idea and themes of the play. Disney had no desire to recreate the stage image from 1904, but to bring into being characters and a Never Land which was universally believable, independent of time and setting.[83] He firmly believed that he with his animated film came as close to recreating Barrie's original idea as was possible.

The vision

When Disney issued the film, they very much decided the future worldwide view of the Peter Pan character. The green-clad cartoon character has come to be who both children and adults associate with Barrie's figure. By establishing the character within the universe which today is Walt Disney Productions, they have contributed to the further canonisation of Peter, grounded in the fact that the stories, whether original or adapted, when issued by Disney are considered to constitute a canon of their own. Since the Disney Company interacts with popular culture on so many levels, a child born in the Western world today is introduced to 'the Disney magic' at an early stage in life. Whether through film, cartoons, books or merchandise they are taught that Disney equals cuddly bears and flying fairies. Disney's contribution to the commercialisation of the child through unparalleled mass marketing of

[82] In the Disney film her name is spelt in one word: Tinkerbell. This has become the official form of spelling.
[83] As with Tinkerbell, the spelling Neverland has become the set spelling of the word.

products, stands as a stark contrast to the celebration of the image of innocence and wonder presented through their films.

Through its pioneering work in the animation genre, Disney was already a well-established institution when *Peter Pan* premiered. By creating new versions of and giving new life to stories such as *Snow White* (1937), *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Cinderella* (1950), Walt Disney Productions had by 1953 achieved a dominant position in the American animation film market. Disney himself had very strong opinions about and ideas of what the goals of an animated film should be. The number one object of his work was to entertain. He believed that everybody had an inherent innocence, and through his films he tried to reconnect them with that innocence. Marc Eliot quotes him as saying that

> I do not make films primarily for children. Call the child innocence. The worst of us is not without innocence, although buried deeply it might be. In my work, I try to reach and speak to that innocence.[84]

The result of this philosophy was fun cartoons with wide-eyed children and cute animals as main characters. Feature films were mostly based on recognisable fairy tales and stories which reminded the older audience of pleasant experiences from childhood while they provided an easy access for new audiences. The way the films were constructed, they also supplied entertainment for both parents and children, being something the family could watch together. By moulding stories to fit his concept, one could say that Disney laid the basis for the type of cartoon which today is easily recognised as a Walt Disney product. According to his animators, the importance of character identification was vital when he developed his technique. His idea was that if the audience could not on some level identify or sympathise with the character, his mission was incomplete.

> Walt wanted his drawings that were animated to seem to be real

[84] Opening quote, see Marc Eliot *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince* (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1993).

> things that had feelings and emotions and thoughts, and the main thing was that the audience would believe them and that they would care what happened to them.[85]

One step towards creating this type of recognition was the use of real-life models when drawing the general outlines of the characters. Disney felt that one of the problems with animated characters was the fact that they looked 'animated'. He wanted movement to look natural so that the audience could identify more with what they saw on screen. There was also the aspect of magic in making a drawn character look natural, thus giving the impression of it being real. As already mentioned, animation gave unlimited possibilities for the use of special effects which it was still hard to make look natural in ordinary feature films.

From stage to screen

Disney's *Peter Pan* is in many ways thematically in accordance with the Disney formula. It is a film about a time of innocence in a country where every day is an adventure. One of the things about the story that attracted Disney as a child was exactly that feeling of adventure. In the film Peter whisks Wendy and her brothers away to Never Land where children can be innocent forever and never have to grow up. They take part in childish adventures spiced with pirates, Indians and mermaids. In the world of make-believe, Peter is the uncrowned king. But instead of recapturing all the similarities, I will concentrate on those parts of this version which differ from the original production. It is where Disney differs that he becomes interesting.

Already at the start of the film we see a significant change from the original storyline. The main point in the film is that Mr. Darling sees it as Wendy's time to become an adult, and that this will be her last night in the nursery. When Peter enters, his first concern is that there will be no more stories and that she needs to come with him so that she can continue to tell them.

[85] Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, *The Illusion of Life: Disney Animation* (New York: Hyperion, 1981), p. 35.

When Wendy worries about what her mother will say, Peter does not understand. Wendy says that a mother is the one who takes care of you, tells you stories and tucks you in at night. Peter, thinking this sounds interesting, concludes that she can come with him and be mother to him and the lost boys. We see here that the whish to stay a child is more strongly emphasised than in the play. Mr. Darling makes it clear that everyone has to grow up. The playfulness of Mr. Darling has also gone from the film. He is characterised as a more authoritative and somewhat frightening figure, discarding his children's talk of Peter Pan as nonsense. He is also made comical, and in the end is outsmarted by both Nana and his children. In a way he is made into a parody. The idea that Mr. Darling was once a child, and that somewhere inside him the remains of that child still exist, is not very believable in the Disney version. This fact is significant when considering Disney's comment on his goal of reaching the inner child in his audience.

The whole issue of Peter not being able to love or to recognise love is almost completely gone. The scene with him, Wendy, the kiss and the thimble is changed, and instead of rendering Wendy as a smart, resourceful young lady, she gives the impression of being a chatty admirer of Peter. Because the reason for the female rivalry between Wendy and Tinker Bell, though reduced and to some extent cut from the original play, is poorly explained in the film, the sexuality manifested in Tinker Bell becomes almost absurd. The fact that any sexual tension between Wendy and Peter is downplayed makes Tinker Bell's hatred of Wendy seem out of place. The fairy's motivation for hating the girl is the idea that Peter can potentially fall for her. By doing so, his childhood days, and consequently his adventures with Tinker Bell, are over. Because love and sexual feelings are never innocent, he will be stepping into the realms of adulthood and maybe choose to follow Wendy. In the film, Tinker Bell is transformed from an ethereal being to a pinup, changing from the original wondrous, mythical creature into a 1950's vain sexual object. This widens the gap between her and Wendy even

more, underlining that Wendy is just a little girl. The fact that the heartbreaking scene with Wendy and Peter playing mother and father to the lost boys is also taken out, further removes the theme of the conflicting needs of the two main characters. Wendy's role as mother can be seen as important in connection with the social views in the US at the time of the film. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

The film is more closely concentrated around the adventure story elements of the plot. Sprinkled with the whimsicality of Disney, it takes away much of the underlying seriousness, and turns the story into pure entertainment. This reinforces the philosophy of the filmmaker. Much of Barrie's original social commentary is removed and replaced with easily accessible humour. It is nevertheless debatable whether the initial social message would, in any case, reach a 1950's audience. This does not mean that Disney did not supply any commentary of his own, a question which I will return to. Even though the film was a hit, the critics did not all think that Disney had maintained the spirit of the author. *The New York Times*'s critic, Bosley Crowther, claimed that

> Mr. Disney's picture has the story but not the spirit of *Peter Pan* as it was plainly conceived by its author and is usually played on stage. However, that's not to say it isn't a wholly amusing and engaging piece of work within the defined limitations of the aforementioned "Disney style".[86]

In terms of reception it is important to notice that the 1953 film transferred the story to a medium which might have put limitations on the original plot line. In his version Disney was not dependent on an active, participating audience, and therefore important aspects connected to the fairy tale elements of the play were removed. Some of the most famous scenes and most quoted lines have disappeared. The building of Wendy's house is completely omitted, a scene which originally confirmed her role as a mother, ending with her acceptance of her new

[86] Quoted in Bruce K. Hanson, *The Peter Pan Chronicles: The Nearly 100 Year History of "The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up"* (New York, NY: Birch Line Press, 1993), p. 169.

status. Wendy and Peter's escape from Marooner's Rock is also missing. The line 'To die will be an awfully big adventure' (91) was important in the original production, and underlines Peter's inability to perceive reality. Every new experience is a game to him, and in criticism this scene is a key to interpretation. With Disney much of the irresponsibility disappears. When Tinker Bell is dying, Peter asks everyone in the audience to express their belief.[87] The key word in the reception of this part of the play, as noted earlier, is the word 'believe'. Audience after audience, adults as well as children, have clapped their hands at this point. The audience now enters a different reality where it is possible to believe in fairies and where miracles happen.

Disney demands no participation, and relies on the fact that the viewers will believe his version. It is impossible to recreate the interaction between audience and the play performed on stage in an on-screen version. Here Barrie built on a longstanding tradition of interactive theatre. The actors played of the audience's responses to the dialogue. The playwrights also considered this interaction, incorporating lines and puns directed at the audience when writing the scenes. This is in stark contrast to the realistic form of theatre that developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. The idea was that the audience would sit and observe the realistic play as if looking at a picture. Therefore the stage became like a three-walled box, with the action taking place within it. Ideally, the audience had no power whatsoever over the action, and the playwright was the god who decided the faith of the characters in the play. Contrary to this, in *Peter Pan* the scene with Peter and Tinker Bell has always been the ultimate proof of whether the audience believes the story or not. The theatre as a performing room gives a certain advantage when trying to interact with the audience. The darkness enclosing the audience in combination with the performance in the light up on stage may help give an impression of a personal connection between actor and audience. Notably Barrie drew

[87] 'Do you believe in fairies? Say quick that you believe! If you believe, clap your hands.' (119).

on the strong tradition of pantomime and this influenced the actions of the actors. The emotional expressions and implied gestures they made added to the spoken dialogue. In the case of *Peter Pan* it is the actor's convincing or credible communication of the action of the play through dialogue and expression which contributes to the belief present in the audience. If the actor gives the impression of believing in his message, the audience will believe it too. Peter addresses himself directly to the ones watching, asking them to believe. He thus creates a sense of collective experience. Two things happen, the audience feels that they share communality larger than themselves, and the actor is able to draw on the audience's belief or disbelief in what he is doing.

This whole form of interactivity disappears when using film as a medium. Disney was free to communicate whatever he wanted, transferring his own reception and interpretation onto the audience. The continued popularity of Peter Pan speaks to the fact that the audience has believed his version. My point is that it was a changed version.

One of the important aspects of the original Peter Pan story which disappears with Disney is the reference to the European preoccupation with fairy tales. In his essay 'Breaking the Disney Spell' Jack Zipes stresses Disney's impact on the literary fairy tale tradition.[88] He points out that with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney institutionalised the fairy tale, domesticated it and locked it into the Disney philosophy. According to Zipes, Walt Disney designed new standards for animation and of course fathered the now famous upbeat and slightly whimsical Disney style. Having a Disney ending to a story has become part of the Western vocabulary. One of Zipes' other points is that by appropriating the fairy tale genre, Disney took away some of the freedom and possibility of individual adaptation connected with the oral tradition.

[88] Jack Zipes, 'Breaking the Disney Spell' in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, ed. by Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas and Laura Sells (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 21-42.

Contrary to what happens in the theatre where the understanding of the play can be seen as a process involving actors, audience, dramatist and the text itself, the film addresses a passive audience who has become accustomed to and has accepted reality as according to Disney. With Peter Pan this also means that the Disney version has become the canonised version, and that the Peter adapted and developed in Walt Disney's imagination has become who the audience sees as the true Peter. The changes made to the original story result in a change in the perception of the audience. The *Peter Pan* film was adapted to fit an American audience, and for them to accept it, certain key elements had to disappear. It was the independent, pioneering spirit of Peter much more than his fairy-like qualities that appealed to the Americans. In the film he becomes a symbol of the small individual who fights and defeats the big villain. In the end Peter dons Captain Hook's coat and hat and becomes captain of the pirate ship. Captain Hook himself is changed from a horrible pirate into a comical, scared man, and the original social commentary made by Barrie is completely gone.

Ann Yeoman sees the following possible result of transferring a story from one type of medium to another:

> Barrie's narrative has been narrowed, and his image of eternal youth fixed by the popular media: abridgments, comic books film and television. Film and television make the imaginative present and concrete in our living-rooms and theaters for the duration of the show. Their sin is that of appropriation: they take something timeless and eternal and bring it into profane time, "fixing" an image in the popular imagination in only one of its myriad shapes and possibilities. So the tale and its hero grow thin and pale as each is robbed of imaginative depth by being diminished, for example, to the two-dimensional outline of a Disney cartoon, sentimentalized and emptied of mythological and psychological resonance in the process.[89]

Her idea is that by defining the figure through the film medium, people such as Disney put limits to the interpretation of the character and, by extension to the imagination. Instead of contributing and inspiring children to explore the thematic meaning of Peter and to

[89] Ann Yeoman, *Now or Neverland: Peter Pan and the Myth of Eternal Youth A Psychological Perspective on a Cultural Icon* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1998), pp. 34-35.

incorporate him into their own imaginary world, the fixed images of him lead to a stereotypical, disneyfied perception of the figure. The original wonder and question as to who he really is, is gone. The multilayered character has been reduced to a comical cartoon.

The important factor here is that the American version of the story of Peter Pan is the one that has been transferred to the rest of the world, and which has thereby set the standard for how we all see the character and what we associate with it. Disney's interpretation has become the general mass-audience interpretation. Then, of course, it becomes a topic of debate whether the capitalist, consumer-based machinery that is Disney and which draws much of its money from merchandise based on their famous characters, should benefit from the adaptation of an icon which was originally connected with innocence. The commercialisation of Peter Pan has in a way made him a mascot for an industry partly based on the appropriation of money. The figure was not commercially innocent in Barrie's times, but the scale is now totally different.

It is a point that one of the results of the transference of the Peter Pan story from one medium to another is that the film has had the potential of reaching a wider audience than the play. Another factor is that each local production of the play anywhere in the world will always contain some form of personal interpretation, while the film will always stay the same. Many find their way back to Barrie's original story through Disney's film, and in that sense it is possible to argue that Disney contributes to a larger recognition and appreciation of the author.

Politics in film

In Barrie's work it is irrefutable that many of his plotlines were inspired by perceptions which were already established in the British conscience. It is also clear that Disney excluded much of the author's original social commentary in his new appropriation of the material. Just as no

text is stable, no artist works in a sterile environment completely devoid of any social influence. The question here centres on the fact whether that influence is expressed consciously or unconsciously in the artist's work. Using *Peter Pan* as an example, I believe it is possible to claim that Disney was also in many ways influenced by contemporary American social and political ideas.

It has in later years been established that Disney was a much more political filmmaker than was first assumed. In his Disney biography, Marc Eliot elaborates on the role Disney played as an FBI informant.[90] From 1940 and onwards he operated as a spy, supplying the FBI with information concerning, amongst other things, union activity in Hollywood. During his hearing in front of The House Un-American Activities Committee Disney told that his studio had, on commission from the government, made pro-American propaganda films during the war.[91] Because of their type of audience, they did not use propaganda in any films beside those however, 'We have large audiences of children and different groups, and we try to keep them as free from anything that would offend anybody as possible.'[92] After a strike at the studio in 1941, Disney was generally suspicious of union activity. At his testimony he clearly stated his anti-communist views and basically blamed the strike on Communist agitators working from within the studio.[93]

Contrary to the above statement, to the critical eye, Disney's politics come across clearly in certain parts of *Peter Pan.* In the already mentioned scene in Act IV, Disney has taken away

[90] Marc Eliot, *Walt Disney: Hollywood's Dark Prince* (New York, NY: Carol Publishing Group, 1993).
[91] In 1947 The House Un-American Activities Committee held a formal hearing investigating the influence of Communism in Hollywood. Walt Disney testified on Friday the 24th of October.
[92] http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/06/documents/huac/disney.html.
[93] 'Disney: Well, I don't believe it is a political party. I believe it is an un-American thing. The thing that I resent the most is that they are able to get into these unions, take them over and represent to the world that that a group of people that are in my plant, that I know are good, 100 percent American, are trapped by this group, and they are represented to the world as supporting all of those ideologies, and it is not so, and I feel that they really ought to be smoked out and shown up for what they are, so that all of the good, free causes of this country, all the liberalisms that really are America, can go out without the taint of Communism. That is my sincere feeling on it. I know that I have been handicapped out there in fighting it, because they [Communists] have been hiding behind this labor setup, they get themselves closely tied up in the labor thing, so that if you try to get rid of them they make a labor case out of it. We must keep the American labor unions clean. We have got to fight them', Eliot, pp. 194-195.

the poison, exchanging it with a bomb. In his attempt to get rid of his arch enemy, Captain Hook delivers a bomb disguised as a present to Peter's house under the ground. When the bomb goes off, the screen goes black and the next picture shows his shattered home covered in grey. Peter crawls out of the ruins, rescues Tinker Bell, who has been covered during the explosion, then goes on to rescue Wendy and the boys from the pirates.

Considering the general cultural climate in America at the time of the release of the film, the associations created by Disney are quite obvious. With the end of WWII culminating in the atomic bomb, and the following Cold War, the fear of the foreign was increasing. The idea of a foreign enemy smuggling a dangerous object, disguised as something homely and familiar, into your home (the bomb is hidden inside a cake) is easy to connect with the general unease felt by the American people. The governments fight against Communism, best symbolised by the Truman Doctrine, and by the treaties made with other governments stating the US's responsibility to defend their respective nations against 'communist aggression', the nuclear race against the Soviet Union and the war in Korea, were the most salient features of the foreign policy at the time.[94] When Peter crawls out of the remains of his home, he can be seen as the symbol of the unconquerable, strong American who recovers from any setback.

Another scene which in political terms becomes symbolic, is the one where Wendy is putting the boys to sleep the night before they go back to their own world. Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan diiscuss this scene in their book:

> Before the last battle between Hook and Peter all the action pauses to hear Wendy sing a song in praise of mothers. Wendy counters the boys' desire to remain in Never-Never-Land, and 'grow up like savages' with the retort, 'But you can't, you need a mother, we all do'. The Lullaby/elegy, has the effect of both resigning the boys to return home to domestication, leaving their Indian warpaint behind and resigning Wendy to her biology.[95]

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[94] Paul S. Boyer, *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II*, 2nd ed., (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), chapter 4.

[95] Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, *Deconstructing Disney* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), pp. 63-4.

During World War II the men had been out fighting something which resulted in American women having to step outside the home to work in the industry. When the men returned, their jobs were already filled by women who by now had a changed perspective on traditional gender roles. In the late 40's and early 50's one of the goals of the Government was to get the economy back on track and a contribution to this was to increase consumerism. President Eisenhower also believed that 'a thriving United States demonstrated the superiority of the free-enterprise system over the Soviet Union's state-run economy'.[96] In an attempt to reinstate balance, focus was turned to family values and domesticity. Boyer claims that 'After two decades of depression, war and postwar deconversion, America longed for social stability and traditional values, and no institution better embodied these virtues than the nuclear family'.[97] An important part of this nuclear family was of course the mother. With the rise of suburbia and the men commuting into town to work, the mothers' place in the home became strengthened. She was seen as the central figure who kept the family together. This view of the family can be seen as a parallel to the focus the Victorian family in Britain was subjected to. The strong influence of film and TV was a part of a growing consumerism, and Walt Disney became the hallmark of American domesticity. It is no surprise that Wendy in the scene stresses the importance of motherhood and family. As well as saying that no one gets by without a mother, she indirectly implies that all fighting heroes can always return to the safety of their home and family.

Though these are both examples of possible critical interpretations, the Disney debate often ends up with whether it is possible to critically examine his work. One can argue that as far as reception goes, the 'Disney spell' that the Western world to some extent is still under, limits the possible interpretations of the story. As the audience, to a certain degree, has such strong preconceptions about the recognisable features of a Disney tale, they forget to engage

[96] Boyer, p. 116.
[97] Ibid., 120.

in personal criticism and analysis when watching a film. It has trouble seeing beyond the innocence and purity that is connected with Disney, and buys the formula of the films being innocent entertainment for children. Without scrutiny they also continue to subject their children to this more static perception. While trained critics are more determined to consider other aspects, such as politics and finance, even today's students of film have problems with looking beyond the Disney magic. Bell, Haas and Sells points to this fact:

> Where cultural critics and film theorists omit Disney, popular critics and mass audiences valorize Disney as safe for children and a good investment for parents. Our students' attitudes suggest that Disney successfully invites mass audiences to set aside critical faculties.[98]

This type of argumentation is stereotyped, and I believe that just as we appropriate text, we also adapt the projected image, making it our own. I am not arguing that it is wrong to watch a Disney film and only to see the entertainment value. His magical world has become a part of Western childhood and his films have introduced millions to stories they might otherwise never have got to know. It is important to know that one is buying a well-thought-out concept, and that what we see is in many cases Disney's interpretation of other people's work. Although the mass audience cannot be made responsible for its own ignorance, it ought to be appropriate to demand critical assessment from those deeming themselves critics.

Stability versus change

While both Barrie and Disney participated in the establishing and fixing of Peter Pan as a cultural icon, popular culture has played a large part in developing and redefining the character outside its original medium. Today Peter Pan has become a kind of brandname, representing large amounts of money, and he is therefore interesting to keep alive for those

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[98] Bell, p. 4.

controlling the rights to his existence. But the question that surfaces is whether commercial interests alone can keep a character alive for so long. The maybe most interesting aspect of this character is his continued popularity and the countless reinventions in different forms. Even though we see theatre directors still embracing the story, it has come to have a meaning and symbolism reaching far wider than the medium it was created for. The point of debate is whether there are surrounding circumstances or something inherent in the character which makes it stand the test of time. I will go as far as claiming that it is not necessarily Peter as a canonised literary or filmic figure which gives him his place in history. He possesses character traits or qualities which make him universal, thus transcending time. It is in other words not Peter Pan as a physical character that stands out to us, but the idea that he represents.

To verify this argument it is necessary to look at the elements of stability and change. Here we have an example of a changing text which continues to reach a changing audience. People appropriate different parts of a text at different historical times, in different groups of society or at different stages in their personal life. Since both the audience and the interpretation of the text changes, one must look beyond this and see whether there are certain themes that stay the same. The idea of the spirit of innocence and youth is central in almost all interpretations of the story, whether popular or academic. I believe this could be connected to an ideal that has existed in society for centuries. The young man has in periods been a symbol of strength and beauty in both society and art. Antiquity illustrates this with the sporting games where young men competed naked to show of their strength and youthful features. Youth equalled beauty, and in a way immortality. If one looks at Greek mythology there are several tales of the young, heroic gods who are immortal. As already mentioned the ideal resurfaced with Rousseau's theory of children's innocence and with the Romantics contribution to art. In the general human spirit lies the idea that childhood is primarily

beautiful, pure, innocent and fun. Most of us look back on childhood with fond memories and associate it with a time in life that was simpler and where actions were without consequences. The youthculture might be stronger today than it has been for a long time. We see it in the fashion industry, and in how advertising often links youth with happiness. The reluctance to grow up is in fact reflected in the statistics, which show that people postpones marriage and children, preferring single life and enjoying the freedom that this offers.[99] With these examples in mind it is possible to say that the importance of the image of youth in society is an underlying stable factor that contributes to the continuation of the character. The image of youth has changed over the centuries, but it is one that is imbedded in and appreciated in Western culture. Peter Pan symbolises both free-spirited youth and the image of a fun and magical childhood. He represents feelings that are inherent in everyone, independent of time or culture.

The other more universal feature which can point to the stable popularity of the character is the general human need for some sort of spirituality. From early times we see a strong religious tradition throughout the world. Nearing modern times, the renewed interest in fairy tales is a continuation of that mythological past. During the last century the mythological world and the spirit of the fairy tale also manifested itself in a growing interest in fantasy literature, culminating in the worldwide hit screen versions of *The Lord of the Rings* and presently five of the Harry Potter books.[100] In *Peter Pan* there are parallels to both mythology

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[99] In late September and early October 2007 the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* ran a series of articles concerning this growing trend. In an interview published on September 24, sociologist Kristin Undheim, claims that the tendencies tell that people postpone settling down often until they are way into their thirties. Her information is based on a survey done by 'Opinion' in 2005: 'De unge voksne'.

[100] The trilogy was originally written by J.R.R. Tolkien and published in three separate volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), *The Two Towers* (1954) and *The Return of the King* (1955) The film version was directed by Peter Jackson and released by New Line Cinema: *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). The stories about Harry Potter were originally written by J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*(1999), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (2005) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). To this date five of the books have been turned into major box office hits. All the films have been released by Warner Bros. Pictures. The first two, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (2001) and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002),

and later fantasy literature. I believe that some of his continued fame lies in the fact that he can be connected with both something real and something fictitious plus, that he represents something eternal. He is first of all a fantasy character, but has roots in a mythology which gives an impression of ancientness and in some way endows him with immortality.

were directed by Chris Colombus, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004) by Alfonso Cuarón, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005) by Mike Newell and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007) by David Yates. Yates is also to direct the sixth film, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* planned for release in 2008, while the director of the seventh, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* has yet to be announced. The film is at this point set for 2010.

3 THE AUTHOR AND BIOGRAPHY

'May God blast any one who writes a biography of me.'[101]

With these words in mind, writer and director Andrew Birkin set out to collect biographical material in connection with a BBC production portraying James Matthew Barrie.[102] That Barrie did not want his personal life displayed and elaborated on by someone other than himself, ties well in with the picture that has been painted of him as a private, guarded writer with manipulative tendencies. The TV mini-series and the consecutive book published by Birkin are to date considered two of the most thorough biographical works done on Barrie. Birkin's attempt at presenting non-biased and nuanced information, and at depicting different perceptions of the author and his work, not making any assumptions concerning his alleged sexuality or the much-debated relationship with the Llewelyn Davies boys, is in my opinion what makes this particular biography so important. The importance of the author's biography that has been displayed in many of the critical interpretations of his work, is in line with a more general interest in author biography. Both among the reading public and maybe especially in literary academic circles the interest in biography has varied over the years, but a general interest in the lives behind the works has always been present. The intriguing and seemingly reoccurring question is that of how big a role an author's biography should play in literary interpretation.

In this last chapter, after giving an overview of the development of biography as a literary genre, I will try to explain why the question of biography is so important in connection with this specific author, and I am going to take a closer look at how Barrie's biography has been used in interpretations of his work. I will also comment on the problems

[101]Andrew Birkin, J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), introduction, p. 6.
[102] *The Lost Boys*, dir. Andrew Birkin (BBC Television, 1978).

that might arise when undertaking this type of interpretation, and finally I will elaborate on the parallel between author and work in regard to popular reception in contrast to the academic reception.

The History of Biography

Through history we see that the validity of biography as literary genre is influenced by social, cultural and political currents in society. In a recent book Nigel Hamilton gives an overview of how the art of biography and the role of the biographer have developed.[103] He argues that the interest in biography can be traced back to ancient times, but that the agenda for writing and the uses of the genre have drastically changed. Early cave paintings bear silent witness to man's need to express himself and to regale in his own greatness. Epics such as *Gilgamesh* and the Norse tales of the life of the Viking kings can also be viewed as early forms of biography. In Antiquity, historians such as Xenophon and Plutarch gave descriptions of the lives of great leaders and philosophers. Warriors and rulers like Julius Caesar also wrote about their lives and ideas. What we see in these cases is that biography was often used to explain political ideas and military tactics. The life of the person was not as important as his ideas and victories. We also see how the genre was used to express religious beliefs and doctrine. The four gospels portraying the life of Jesus, which were finally included in the Bible, and which can also be seen as a form of biography, were a result of a selective process which excluded depictions of Christ's life that did not concur with the religious and political agenda of the religious leaders of the time. The main Christian idea that man's relationship with God is personal and that salvation depends on the individual lead to many religious types of biography and autobiography as Christianity spread through Europe. Religious confessions, and accounts of religious awakenings and epiphanies were documented in large numbers. The

[103] The following discussion is indebted to Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, MT: Harvard University Press, 2007).

confessions of Augustine might be the most important and influential work within this type of biography.

With the start of the Renaissance man, instead of categorising himself as a member of a larger group, such as race, party or family, started to discover and appreciate his own individuality. Investigations into the experiences of former great people could lead to a more thorough understanding of oneself. Reprints of classical biographical texts emerged and together with them a general renewed interest in the Classics. William Shakespeare was partly responsible for introducing a new use for biography. With his history plays and historical tragedies, depicting the lives of the former British kings, he not only made history accessible to the general public but also combined fact and fiction in a new theatrical genre. I believe one could argue that he brought historical fact to popular culture, and that this might be seen as a parallel to the exploding popular interest in reality during the late twentieth century. Shakespeare's plays displays an interest in human psychology and a quest to discover why some people act in certain way. Through historical-biographical method the playwright investigates the human soul. Plays like Hamlet, Othello or Richard III are just as much psychological studies as tragedies or historical plays. In 1683 John Dryden used the term 'biography' in a reference to Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. This contributed to defining biography as a genre.

The Age of Reason saw the birth of Western modern philosophy and the interest in new social and natural sciences. Politics for the philosophers became a question of the individual in relation to the state. The two conflicting philosophical trends were the Rationalist idea that thinking is the basis for all human understanding versus the Empiric idea that knowledge comes through sensing and experience. In the midst of these conflicting theories the father of modern literary biography, Samuel Johnson, said that reading about people who were heroic and did no wrong had no educational value for the enlightened man.

Johnson thought that an identification with the biography of others was important as an insight into one's own psyche, and that the genre therefore was far superior to that of ordinary history. This new view on biography led to a stream of personal, confessional, autobiographical writings, often of an explicit nature. During this period people expressed a general need to save their accounts for posterity and diaries and journals became popular. As Hamilton points out, self-reflection was no longer considered narcissistic but seen as an important step in the interpretation of the human soul. This is a contrast to the earlier religious confessions. The secularisation of society in general gave room for personal reflection, exemplified by writings by authors as Voltaire and Rousseau, on non-religious topics.

The revolutions of 1776 and 1789 contributed to the growing sense of self. In Britain the Romantics embraced this self-reflective way of writing and incorporated it into various forms of art. In 1808 Sir Walter Scott wrote that 'The present age has discovered a desire, or rather a rage, for literary anecdote and private history'.[104] The romantic sentiment influenced the depiction of autobiographical fact, blurring the distinguishable lines between fact and fiction and questioning whether art imitated life or life was a manifestation of art. The sentimentality of the Romantics stood in contrast to the Victorian moralist ideal, emphasising respectability, illustrated by virtues such as restraint and moderation The habit of indulging in self-expression was seen as a break with the new ideal. A new focus on reputation meant that a distinctive line was drawn between what was expressed and what went on behind closed doors. Privacy became an elongation of the worship of home and family. Books as various as Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* and J.M. Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy*, are representatives of a type of biographical fiction where authors could indulge in sentiment or political and social criticism without breaking with the Victorian ideal.

[104] Ibid., p. 101.

During the twentieth century we see the popularisation of biography exploding. The general interest in the genre led to its expansion into other areas than print biography. At the start of the century, Sigmund Freud claimed psychoanalysis to be the new form of biography.

> A real human life should, Freud felt, be considered not as an idealized Victorian exemplar but as a psychological *riddle*. The solving of that riddle, using the technique of psychoanalysis, would, he told Jung, his heir-apparent, be “the first step in biography”.[105]

His idea was that you could interpret a person’s psychological profile by reading his or her biography. Virginia Woolf claimed that the biographer should ensure ‘his freedom and his right to independent judgement’.[106] By this she meant that it was the biographer’s duty to tell the truth, and not to cover up details to make biography fit the old Victorian ideals.

As the genre has expanded beyond print and become a part of popular culture the lines between fiction and fact are gradually erased. The growing influence of the film media has given room for interpretations as various as propaganda, documentary and reality. In the literary industry the interest in biography has only increased, the popular biography, to some extent, passing the academic in popularity.

In need of an author

In his essay ‘Literature and Biography’, Russian Formalist Boris Tomaševskij elaborates on the interest in author biography as a means for interpreting the written text. He asks: ‘do we need the poet’s biography in order to understand his work, or do we not?’[107] He goes on to comment on what I believe to be two of the main historical directions within literary criticism.

> Many biographers cannot be made to comprehend an artistic work as anything but a fact of the author’s biography; on the other hand, there are those for whom any kind of biographical

[105] Ibid., pp. 136-7.
[106] Ibid., p. 166.
[107] Boris Tomaševskij, ’Literature and Biography’, in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 82.

> analysis is unscientific contraband, a “back-door” approach.[108]

Within a formalist tradition, the idea of text and language is grounded in the belief that the text has a literary significance of its own, independent of time, background or authorial intention. The historicist view is that it is impossible to understand a text without considering historical or cultural aspects, as well as the interpretive preconceptions of the reader. Supporters of the formalist approach will say that relating interpretation to biographical information is irrelevant. Those inclined to the other approach will claim that the life of the author is one of the many contexts that may be relevant in understanding his work.

Tomaševskij for instance discusses a time when the identity of the creator of the artwork was inconsequential. Often the artist represented what today equals a trademark. This can be exemplified by artists letting their pupils conduct the work while they signed the finished product. In these instances the name does not reflect the man but represents a set of identifiers such as choice of colour, use of light and brush strokes which together make up the identity of the artist. Collective codes in society identify the artwork. This is much like the way we identify a Disney product today through the significance of the Disney style, and not by the artist responsible for the specific product.[109] So, who signed the work was unimportant and the depicted subject was the only means of interpretation. Tomaševskij goes on to say that the interest in the subject first entered into the literary world during the eighteenth century.

> However, during the individualization of creativity – an epoch which cultivated subjectivism in the artistic process – the name and personality of the author came to the forefront.[110]

The focus on the subject manifested itself both politically and culturally. Politically the individual’s civil rights in relationship to the state was verified through written laws. The

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[108] Ibid., p. 81.
[109] The exceptions here are the cartoonists drawing Donald Duck. They each have a unique style and to any Donald fan that uniqueness adds to the genius of the cartoonist. A well-read fan will be completely able to separate for example the drawings of Carl Barks form those of Don Rosa. The drawing technique here identifies the man behind the cartoon.
[110]Tomaševskij, in Burke, p. 81.

passing of copyright laws helped define the author as a legally separate entity. This helped distinguish the author as an individual. In some instances the lines between artist and work become blurred. A result of Romanticism was that 'The poets used their lives to realize a literary purpose'[111] In the case of Barrie this becomes an important aspect when discussing his biography, and one crucial point to examine is where the author ends and the literary persona surfaces.

Barrie and the Biographical Interpretation

In his dedication 'To the Five', printed as a foreword in the long-awaited publication of *Peter Pan* in 1928, Barrie thanks the Llewelyn Davies brothers for the inspiration they gave to the story. Here he says that 'As for myself, I suppose I always knew that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. That is all he is, the spark I got from you.'[112] This means that from this publication it has always been publicly known that the story, or at least the main character, was inspired by people in close proximity to the author. Barrie used his own milieu ruthlessly as inspiration for his stories, and this may certainly have encouraged the tendency among biographers and critics of reading his own biography into his work. At the same time, he was a guarded person who did not like to have his personal life displayed before the public eye. When he and his wife divorced, he dreaded the public scandal that could come in the wake, more, seemingly, than the personal trauma. After the deaths of George and Michael he for a long time lived almost as a recluse. He never wrote his autobiography, and though he kept extensive notebooks throughout his adult life, none of them were ever published. The notebooks are now kept at Yale and are available for researchers to examine. Forty-eight in number, they are generally notations concerning ideas

[111] Tomaševskij, in Burke, p. 85.
[112] Dedication, in *Peter Pan*.

for plays and various literary works. It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether they are journal-like comments like some tend to believe, or just general literary observations.

One fascinating point is how someone so concerned with privacy had no regrets whatsoever when it came to exploit the ones around him for his own literary inspiration. His mother's childhood memories became his first commercial success, and from his notebooks it is detectable that he was a close observer of the people around him. To the critical eye it looks like Barrie was an author who saw a literary possibility in every occasion. In one of his notebooks he writes that

> Such a man if an author, wd be studying his love affair for book.
> Even while proposing, the thought of how it wd *read* wd go thro' him.
> Literary man can't dislike any one he gets copy out of.[113]

This passage was written during his courtship of Mary Ansell, and it is easy to read it as a biographical note on himself. Lisa Chaney claims that much of the thematics of *Tommy and Grizel* are closely connected with that of Barrie's own marriage. These types of annotations can be seen as conclusive arguments and proof that the author used every emotional experience as a means for an end, namely his literature. It can be an example of his inspiration, but it is also possible to read the passage as a regret of the fact that he cannot connect to the situation in any other way than as a writer.

For me it is natural, to some extent, to see Barrie's preoccupation with privacy as a result of the time he grew up in. Born in 1860 he was definitely a child of the Victorian era. The ideals of the time must have, whether consciously or unconsciously, been inherent in his psyche. It is also notable that his mother came from a religious background, no doubt bringing the ideas of duty and morality into her son's upbringing. In his conduct it might seem that the author was used to doing what was expected of him. Biographers like Chaney for argue that his marriage was undertaken not necessarily because of love but because you were expected

[113] Birkin, p. 23.

to marry. His need for privacy might have been a result of a deeper personal and cultural influence than just having to do with covering up secrets. Because the Victorians focused on family and made it a main goal in society, Barrie might not have been interested in making his failure as a model citizen too apparent.

The thing that makes this author interesting when discussing text and biography is the thematic incorporation of his biography into his fiction. This often results in his life being read into his fiction, as well as his fiction being used as a source in constructing his biography. Since the relationship with the Llewelyn Davies boys became so vital in the creation of *Peter Pan*, it might be impossible to avoid this biographical fact when encountering the play. The intertwined fictitious story and the real history has in some ways become a constituent part of the work's reception in critical circles. It is to some extent presupposed that biography must be part of interpretation. Because the author in his dedication stresses the point that the boys and his adventures with them inspired the play, he in a way directs the readers' way of thinking, reminding them that they should take this into consideration when reading. This way of grounding fantasy in reality is both a way of displaying the author's personal emotions towards the story, and a way of creating a stronger link between reader and subject. When Barrie establishes a bond between fiction and reality, he makes it easier for the reader to believe his tale. In a way he manipulates the reader into seeing reality in fantasy.

Besides the friendship with the Llewelyn Davis family it is one particular incident in Barrie's life which has been closely connected to the theme in *Peter Pan*. This episode is also often used to bring out one of the assumed personality traits of the author. When Barrie was six, his brother David, on his fourteenth birthday, skated with a friend and fell through the ice. He survived the accident, but later died of the complications. The death of David resulted in a psychological breakdown for Margaret, and she took to her bed. In a desperate attempt to

relieve his mother's inconsolable grief, Barrie tried to become his brother by literally stepping into his shoes. His idea was that if he could somehow merge himself with David, his mother would recover. Years later Margaret would still whisper David's name before going to sleep. The account of his actions is found in *Margaret Ogilvy.*[114] After practicing his brother's way of whistling and his manner of standing, Barrie dressed in his clothes and went into his mother's bedroom, where she had been bedridden ever since David died. Not counting the shock this must have been to Margaret, what biographers often read from this is that it shaped the author's ability to take on another person's persona. This was also a skill he would, as already mentioned, find useful in his early work as a journalist, and it was later turned into one of the main character traits of Peter Pan. Peter is amongst other things a master imitator and uses this skill to manipulate the people around him. In the author's life we see a repetitive pattern of him trying to direct his acquaintances as if he would orchestrate a play. By economically supporting the Llewelyn Davies family, he created a relational dependence based on gratitude and obligation, one which it was arguably impossible for them to break with. One might say that by using people he knew as inspiration for his characters, Barrie could stage his own life and control his surroundings in making them act as he wanted them to as part of his literary world.

In *The Little White Bird* Barrie tells the story of an author and bachelor who befriends a small boy while walking in the park. Some of the depictions of their relationship have triggered one of the most debated features concerning Barrie amongst biographers and scholars. As a result, the discussion of the author in terms of biography and its relevance for interpretation has come to centre on the question of his sexuality. The task of verifying whether or not he had paedophile tendencies seems to have become the main goal of several researchers. Here we see an example of how his fiction has become decisive in the

[114] *Margaret Ogilvy*, pp. 9-15.

reconstruction of his biography. In his life there are also several examples of how he seemed to befriend the children of his acquaintances. He was close to both Arthur Quiller-Couch's son Bevil, who he termed 'my favourite boy in the wide wide world',[115] and W.E. Henley's daughter Margaret, whose significance I will return to later.[116] Barrie's alleged sexuality is almost always grounded in readings of his work. In chapter XIX, 'An Interloper', of the already mentioned book, the author describes an overnight visit from the little boy David. This chapter of the novel, depending on one's approach, can either be read as a disturbing post-Freudian testimony to a man's secret lust for children, or as an elegy of a wanted son who never turned up. Since the whole chapter can be read in either fashion, I am including only an excerpt here to illustrate the possible dual interpretations:

> David watched my preparations with distasteful levity, but anon made a noble amend by abruptly offering me his foot as if he had no longer use for it, and I knew by intuition that he expected me to take off his boots. I took them off with all the coolness of and old hand, and then I placed him on my knee and removed his blouse. This was a delightful experience, but I think I remained wonderfully calm until I came somewhat too suddenly to his little braces, which agitated me profoundly. I cannot proceed in public with the disrobing of David.[117]

By certain biographers this is used as proof of Barrie's paedophilia, while others read it as an imagined intimate moment between father and son. At the time of publication *The Times* wrote about the novel that

> If a book exists which contains more knowledge and more love of children, we do not know it. To the [narrator] the smallest details of his adored David, his braces and his behaviour in the bath, are not too trivial to dwell on. In fine, here is an exquisite piece of work.[118]

[115] Birkin, p. 24.
[116] Sir Arthur Quiller-Coach (1863-1944) was a literary critic and is most famous for editing the *Oxford Book of English Verse.* W.E. Henley (1849-1903) was an editor, critic and writer and allegedly, because of a leg amputation due to tuberculosis, inspired the character of Long John Silver in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.
[117] *The Little White Bird*, p. 201.
[118] Birkin, p. 95.

We see from the review that there was no sense that this text was inappropriate at the time. On the contrary the reviewer appreciates the art of the exact passage which has later been the ground for discussion.

Arguably, a change in biographic research and focus comes as time distances the biographer from the subject. The early Barrie biographies underline the author's genius while the later ones reveal a more ambivalent and multifaceted person. J.A. Hammerton's book from 1929 was accordingly called *Barrie, the Story of a Genius* while J.A. Roy's book from 1937 was titled *James Matthew Barrie: An Appreciation*. Already the titles here disclose and establish the authors' opinion of the subject. The first official biography is *The Story of J.M.B.,* which was written by Peter Davies in 1941. Cynthia Asquith's memoir from 1954, *Portrait of Barrie*, depicts the last twenty years of the author's life, during which she worked as his secretary. As late as 1970 in Janet Dunbar's *J.M. Barrie: the Man behind the Image* we still see the biographer's avoidance of the delicate question. As Hamilton points out, the discrepancies between that biography and the facts researched for the BBC mini-series was one of the aspects that made Birkin investigate the story further.[119] In later biographies, the view of the biographer, though usually covert, is often detectable through approach and depiction. An example here is the different perspectives in the two biographies by Birkin and Chaney. While Birkin chooses not to point out one specific view as more or less important, in Chaney it is possible to deduct that she does not agree with the view of Barrie as a paedophile. Birkin openly asked the last Llewelyn Davies boy, Nico, what his view was on this point.[120] Nico's answer was that there had never been any signs of a paedophile relationship between Barrie and any of the boys. To him the author had seemed very sexless. This is of course no point of verification, seeing that Nico's interest was in protecting the author's memory. In a documentary featured on the DVD-release of the mini-series, Birkin states that his personal

[119] Hamilton, p. 263-271.
[120] Birkin, p. 130.

theory was that Barrie was actually sexually impotent, though this is never mentioned anywhere in the book. Because the topic is so important in Barrie's academic reception, taking a clear stand in favour of any of these interpretations means almost certainly that any studies concerning the subject will be coloured by the researcher's assumptions.

Sometimes the interpretations are so clearly marked by biographical preconceptions that these pervade the entire work. An example is the chapter on Barrie in Humphrey Carpenter's *Secret Gardens: a Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature*, where the reading of the Peter Pan story and the depiction of the author's biography is both intertwined and marked by the researcher's view on his sexuality. The result is such a lack of nuance in the text that it becomes almost impossible to regard it as a serious contribution to critical study. Carpenter's method shows how one can interpret any text to fit one's own assumptions focusing on the parts that seem to agree with and affirm preconceived ideas. When the reading becomes biased, it can be difficult to assess it as a reliable interpretation.

Traces of Barrie in *Peter Pan*

To critics and biographers, the themes of *Peter Pan* have come to represent a symbiosis of Barrie's personal wishes and regrets, and the influence of the close relationship with the Llewelyn Davies'. When discussing this topic it is important to distinguish between verifiable biographical facts and interpretive assumptions made from the literary text. We know that several of the characters were inspired by real people. All the names of the Llewelyn Davies boys were incorporated into the play. It is also a fact that the name Wendy was inspired by the already mentioned Margaret Henley, who died only six years old. Barrie depicted her already in *Sentimental Tommy* as Reddy, as a friend of the main character who dies at the age of six, but it was as Wendy that she was made immortal.[121] There are differing accounts of her exact

[121] After *Peter Pan*, Wendy became a popular name for girls both in Britain and America. In the *Everyman Dictionary of First Names* from 1993, by Leslie Dunkling and William Gosling,, the name is listed as having

phrasing, but the general idea is that Margaret used to call the author ‘my friendly’. Because she was small and had problems with pronouncing the word right the nickname came out as ‘friendy’ which Barrie then reinvented as ‘Wendy’.[122] The author’s love for his many St. Bernhard dogs was manifested in the Darling children’s nurse Nana, and much of the action was built on the pirate games he used to play with the boys. Certain facts where also incorporated into the text through its stages of publication. Hook’s line of ‘Floreat Etona’ (143) as he plunges to his death, indicating that he once attended Eton, was added to the 1911 novel and then included in the 1928 printed version of the play. It was a note included as all the boys consecutively attending Eton.[123]

Critics often see the Peter character as Barrie’s depiction of himself, a boy who could never grow up and who feels more comfortable around children than in the presence of fellow adults. Because Peter has chosen to reject the world, he cannot be a part of ordinary family rituals and in a way becomes an outcast. This is paralleled in Barrie’s inability to have a normal family life with his wife and instead observing others, vicariously adopting their happiness. He is seen to transfer some of the other people’s normality onto himself, although always knowing that it is not for real. Peter Pan does the same thing. Barrie’s sense of being different while growing up, and the resulting retreat into adventure stories and theatre productions where he could be whoever he wanted, is mirrored in the theatre-like world of Never Land. In that world Peter is the director. When he is away, Never Land goes into a sort of resting mode waiting for his return. To Peter every situation gives room for role-play, with him undergoing character changes depending on who he is acting against. With Hook he is a fierce adversary, with the Indians a peace monger, with the Lost Boys he is a renowned leader

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been invented by Barrie. The name has also been of further use. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* from 2001 lists a ‘Wendy house’ as being a toy house for children to play in. The origin is from the house the lost boys built for Wendy in Never Land.

[122] Lisa Chaney, *Hide-and-Seek with Angels: A Life of J.M. Barrie* (London: Hutchinson, 2005), p. 217.

[123] J.M. Barrie, *The Admirable Crichton, Peter Pan, When Wendy Grew Up, What Every Woman Knows, Mary Rose*, ed. by Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 321.

and with Wendy he plays father to her mother. We see here a comparison with the roles Barrie took in orchestrating his environments to fit his own ideas.

The relationship between Peter and Wendy is a theme throughout the story. In the beginning we see her obvious attraction to him, and his emancipated adventurous spirit while he sees the caring mother he never had. Peter understands that what Wendy wants and what he can provide do not correspond. He takes part in her attempt to create what resembles a family in Never Land, being the father and mimicking typical manly behaviour like going hunting. He knows that by humouring her, he too in a way gets what he wants. They play the game of happy family, but through the play we see the unrealistic terms that lie beneath. This illusion can be compared to the one created by Barrie in real life. Seeing the family life he so desperately wanted mirrored in the Llewelyn Davies family and missing from his own marriage, he tried to be a part of that happiness by play-acting the role of 'father' to Sylvia as 'mother'. Peter senses that Wendy wants something more than friendship from him, but he is aware that he cannot feel for her what she wants him to. He likes the illusion, while she wants reality. Further, the story of Peter and Wendy is often interpreted as Barrie trying to express the regret he feels about his own feelings towards marriage, feeling more at home as a part of the Llewelyn Davies illusion than within his own family life. Emotionally he has been described as immature, showing more understanding for childish fantasies than for the complex emotions of adults. Further parallels are often drawn to *Tommy and Grizel* in combining Barrie, Tommy and Peter in one.

As discussed in Chapter One, the symbolism concerning the passing of time is also a highly relevant theme in the play. Barrie observed how time was an intrusive factor in the lives he orchestrated around him. The children he adored grew into men and women, while he remained behind. When he died so young, his brother became the ideal, symbolically overcoming time, staying in his childlike state forever. The author was also a helpless witness

to the boys suffering as they watched their father's sickness develop. It is possible to read the play as Barrie's attempt to create something eternal, and to show the boys a place where you could control even life and death. In Never Land childhood lasts forever and the adult horrors that time brings with it are stoppable, because on the island time does not exist.

The biographical fallacy

It is difficult to distinguish between the biographical and the fictional Barrie. As already argued, his fiction is often used as argument when discussing his biographical background, resulting in scenes and descriptions from the work being used to verify traits in the author's personality. One example is the story of his brother's death. Considering that Barrie both depicted this many years after the incident, as well as adding his personal narrative touches, it is debatable how reliable it is as biographical fact. The interpretation of the chapter from *The Little White Bird* in authenticating theories about Barrie's sexuality shows how one tends to use fiction as basis for establishing a type of psychological profile on the author's behalf.

When referring to his fiction as proof of particular biographical fact, it is necessary to take into consideration that as an author Barrie had complete control over the information displayed in his work. The author here had the opportunity to establish for eternity the reason why he had written the play. Thus he contributed to, retracted from, or added to the myth. In his introduction to the Oxford World Classics edition of the play, Peter Hollindale describes how Barrie usually saw the production of a play as a cooperation between the playwright, director and the actors.[124] It is highly plausible that he took notice of audience reception when adapting the different versions, directing the story to fit the audiences' interpretations. This also enabled him to manipulate the reader and the work's further reception into accepting

[124] Hollindale, Introduction, in Barrie, p. x.

what he wanted to be the truth. Because *Peter Pan* was published in different forms during the author's life, Barrie had the opportunity to play an active part in the possible changes of the reception of his own work. With certain changes in the story, he could link the character to his own situation or remove him from it.

Tomasevskij, using Voltaire as one of his examples, discusses the fact that some authors have deliberately used their personalities as part of the creative process:

> Voltaire made his artistic work a tool for propaganda, and his life, bold and provocative, served this same end. […] Voltaire's works were inseparably linked with his life.[125]

In these cases, using one's own biography becomes a form of narrative technique, and the author might indirectly expect to be taken into account in an interpretive process. By printing the dedication which was rewritten and reworked several times before being printed, the work became a tool for establishing the author's motives. When the author has this sort of power, it is difficult to establish the boundaries between truths and lies. Since it is difficult to extract the facts from the fiction, it is also difficult to know what truths to measure the facts up against. One can argue that the only facts acceptable as truths are the ones which are verifiable through publicly available documents and recognised sources. If these sources are scarce and in addition based on the author's self-presentation, they are not trustworthy and therefore have to be disregarded in interpretation. There is no way to establish whether Barrie's notebooks are personal anecdotes or ideas to be used in his work, and therefore they alone cannot be used as reliable non-fictional documents.

There is also the question of whether this type of biographical reading puts unreasonable limitations on the reception of the work. Since so much is concentrated around biographical information, the interpretation of the work is narrowed and the narrative depth and complexity of the literary text are not fully explored. Preconceived notions of the text's

[125] Tomaševskij, in Burke, pp. 82-83.

meaning direct the way of reading, and consequently decides the interpretation. In our days critics are so used to linking Peter with the author that almost all readings are coloured by this.

Popular versus academic reception

In the reception of *Peter Pan* the connection between author and work is intriguing because of the two different directions taken in popular culture and critical interpretation. There is quite a large discrepancy between the academic reception with its, in most cases, interest centred on biography, and the popular reception, exemplified in this dissertation by Disney, which seems to remove the work from the author. One can even argue that popular reception allows the character to overshadow the work, spreading into other parts of culture where the symbolism of the character itself becomes unique and all-important. While the biography of the author has come to set standards in the academy, among the audience and readers the character has taken on a life of his own. It is a point, however, that the biographers writing about the author has been part of the popular biographic tradition. In the academy on the other hand publications usually centre on the work and symbolism of the character. The complexity here is in the fact that the scholarly literary tradition which so closely connects Barrie's biography to his fictitious work, tend to produce studies of the Character rather than of the author. This can be connected to the view of biography as a subordinate genre in the academy.

In Western culture the figure of Peter Pan has expanded further than the original story and can be described as a cultural icon. He represents a set of feelings and a mode of humanity which is immediately recognised without the presence of the author. For most academics, Barrie's biography has become part of the history of the text. This makes it a tool for interpretation which links the author and the text closer together. In popular culture, however, the focus is on the continued fascination with the character, and on what he

represents to each specific member of the audience. My experience during the work on this project is that popular culture identifies the character as a work by Disney. It is only in literary circles that the name of the author is mentioned in response to the introduction of the character. The themes of youth and inconsequential childhood dreams shine through in both contexts and receptions, however.

Different interpretive communities add different perspectives and various degrees of validity to interpretation. The fact that academic and popular reception focus on separate parts of the story, add to the versatility of the character. Maybe this adaptability of Peter Pan is partially what has kept the character alive for so long. In Chapter Two, I have already discussed how people appropriate different aspects of a text at different stages in life or from different positions in society. Michel de Certeau explains how a reader creates new meanings from text. He goes as far as claiming that 'the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them; it is ordered in accord with codes of perception that it does not control.'[126] Some claim that the appropriation of text is reserved for the literary critic, saying that the general masses are uninformed consumers of pre-decided messages. De Certeau's point is that the average reader should not be undermined. There is no reason why the literary critic should be predisposed to making a more correct interpretation of the text, as opposed to the common reader. Reading practices manifest themselves differently within reading communities. With Barrie, we see that the various interpretations springing from dissimilar readers result in the multifaceted impression of both author and character. The difference in reception and appropriation in the end widens the field of interpretation, which adds depth and complexity to the character of Peter Pan. The separate and different circuits create distinctive lives for the same character.

[126] Michel de Certeau, 'Reading as poaching', in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1984), p. 170.

CONCLUSION

What is it about Peter Pan which still renders him intriguing even one hundred years after his creation? After having reviewed the original fame of Barrie and the consecutive, though to a certain extent, altered Disney film, I do not believe there is one explicit explanation. Numerous factors and circumstances have contributed to the continuing preoccupation with the character. A symbiosis of author and production intentions, and the response and interaction with the audience, combined with certain tendencies in culture and society are all closely connected to the continuation and further development of the character. Historically it is possible to say that the combination of Barrie's celebrity status as a writer and underlying, cultural, currents in British society contributed to the instant success of the play. The idolisation of the innocence of children, the deep roots of the fairy story and the festive time of Christmas when the play was originally staged, can all have been aspects that where important to the early reception of the play. The positive personal experiences as a child, or the regret of not having a proper childhood, can both awaken a collective feeling of magic when encountering Peter Pan for the first time. One reason for this can be that the general idea of childhood being magical is so deeply embedded in Western culture.

The reception of the story through out time has had a huge impact on the development of the character. With the release of Disney's animated feature version in 1953, the character has further developed, both because of Disney's interpretation, the new medium that was used as a mean for interpretation and the fact that it reached a whole new audience. The general image connected with Peter Pan today is that created by Disney either through film, books or some form of merchandise. The continued popularity of the character implies that the audience does not necessarily lose its belief in Peter Pan because the story changes. It is arguable whether Disney has removed too much of the original story, but it is certain that the

introduction of Peter Pan into the Disney canon has allowed for a wider appreciation amongst a wider audience.

All the way from the birth of the character to the image of Peter Pan as we see him today, things have been lost and added along the way. While the original fascination with the story lies in the fact that Peter has chosen to stay young forever, and therefore exists for always in a state of eternal purity and innocence, Disney's version emphasises the fact that it is impossible to stay young for evermore. In the beginning of the film, Wendy is scared of being removed from the nursery because that ultimately leads to her becoming an adult. After spending time in Never Land with Peter and the lost boys, she returns to her own life ready to grow up.[127] In spite of the changes in interpretation between play and film, it is still the idea of Peter as an eternal boy that is associated with the character today. In psychology it is, as I have noted, seen as a problem state to be in, but as part of popular culture Peter has become a positive symbol of eternal youth.[128] The fact that the basic traits connected with Peter Pan are the same today as they were in 1904 leads to one possible conclusion. The character is not limited to the historical context of his origins. He embodies a set of recognisable, human emotions that seems present, independent of time and place. It is not Peter Pan as a physical character that stands out to us, but the idea that he represents.

The strongest evidence of the argument above is the enthusiasm I witnessed in October 2007. When *Peter Pan* premiered on the main stage of Det Norske Teatret in Oslo on the 11th of that month, Mona Levin wrote in her review that the production manifests the theatre's ability to 'recapture childhood in adults and nurture the fantasy of children on their own terms.'[129] I personally understood the genius of the author first when I saw the children shouting at Captain Hook and pleading for Tinker Bell's return to life. In tracing the initial

[127] *Peter Pan*, dir. Hamilton Luske, Clyde Geronimo and Wilfred Jackson (Walt Disney Company, 1953).
[128] Ann Yeoman, *Now or Neverland: Peter Pan and the Myth of Eternal Youth. A Psychological Perspective on a Cultural Icon* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1998), p. 73.
[129] Mona Levin, 'Eventyrlig teaterfest' in *Aftenposten*, Saturday 13 October 2007, culture section, p. 10, my translation.

main theme of the story all the way from 1904 to 2007, I have come to recognise a writer who had a peculiar ability to connect wit the audience's nerve. I have discussed the focus on the author's biography in interpretation. The performance in Oslo strengthens the argument that Barrie's person is secondary in popular reception. The Norwegian audience has no strong knowledge of the author of this play. Peter Pan's rise to fame has been at the expense of J.M. Barrie. Biographical evidence tells of an author and of a family who, for the duration of their lives, and due to the following literary interpretations of those lives, are forever haunted by 'a terrible masterpiece'.

Appendix

This excerpt of an additional scene not included in the production or printed version of the play, is kept as a part of The Lord Chamberlain's Collection in the manuscript department of the British Library, catalogued under LCP 1905/32E.

PETER PAN, ACT II, SCENE 2:

PETER

A merman I
With my tail on high! (kicking up leg slily)
In the way that most allures;
I humbly wish,
O famous fish,
To pay my respects to yours!

BOYS

We accomp'ny him
And all of us swim
With our beautiful tails as lures.
(holding up legs)

MERMAID

You're awfully cool!

PETER

I'm rather cool
With your tail I so want to play

MERMAID

Then please to write
Mamma to-night
And ask her if you may.

BOYS

Yes, that would be better
He's writing the letter
How we wonder what he'll say.

PETER

(Singing as the mermaid beneath the sea)

Dear Mermaid may
Your daughter play
At tails to-night with me?
I wish she would
And now conclude,
With kindest wishes, P.

BOYS

That cannot fail
To pull her tail,
What will the answer be?

UNSEEN MERMAID

Dear Sir, who wrote
Received your note.

MERMAID

O say that he may come!

UNSEEN MERMAID

My leave you've got
Don't make her hot
Yours faithfully, her mum.

(Delight of MERMAID as well as BOYS)

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