Peter Pan

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Peter Pan

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Arthur Rackham. Headpiece to ‘Peter Pan’.
Summary

This essay compares and contrasts the character of Peter Pan in two works, Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and the play Peter Pan, and raises the question of what J. M. Barrie intended with his creation of Peter Pan and particularly his transformation of the character and his removal of Peter Pan from the original context of The Little White Bird into a novel and later into a play. Chapter one introduces the Kensington Gardens Peter and argues that what Barrie truly meant to do with his creation of Peter Pan was to speak to those parents who had experienced the loss of their children. Chapter two is in two parts, first to introduce and discuss the Peter from the play and compare him to the original Kensington Gardens Peter, but most importantly to introduce the Peter who cannot be touched and the idea that Barrie envisioned him as the embodiment of childhood. It also discusses some of the possible reasons for the transformation of the character. The second part focuses on the relationship between Peter Pan and Captain Hook on the one hand and between Peter Pan and Wendy on the other and how the interpretation of these relationships changes if Peter Pan is simply an illusion, an embodiment of youth and joy. Furthermore, although it is possible to analyze Peter Pan without linking him to some of the events in J. M. Barrie’s personal life it deeply enhances our understanding of the character to know a little of the author’s biography. Therefore chapter three briefly discusses the personal life of Barrie and some of the events that were clearly the focal point in the creation of Peter Pan.
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Introduction

How can literature for children be defined? Is literature for children literature that has been written for children or literature that has been written by children? What about the medium in which children’s literature is delivered? Most children are illiterate until the age of five or six, and thus the stories that are meant for them – written for them – are delivered by adults. How much gets lost in translation? How much do children really understand of the literature that is meant for them? Perhaps some of these questions are the reason why it is so difficult to analyze children’s literature. Children are young, unformed and innocent and it is difficult to determine where to draw the line. What is appropriate?

One of the most beloved children’s works of all time is J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan. It is a story that has survived many transformations: in short story form in The Little White Bird (1902), as a play which was first performed in 1904, in an independent extraction from The Little White Bird as Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (1906), and as a novel in Peter and Wendy (1911). It has also been widely translated and adapted, including Disney animations, the most recent feature films being from 2003 titled Peter Pan, a spin-off titled Hook from 1991 and annual Disney animations since 2008, all immensely popular. Countless books have been published on the life of the author and a recent film, Finding Neverland (2004), has also been released. There seems to be an endless fascination with the character of Peter Pan and his creator.

The object of my research and the aim of my comparison of two works by Barrie, Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens and the play Peter Pan, is to discover not only relevant reasons behind Barrie’s transformation of the eponymous character from his initial conception but also the creation of the character and his characteristics. I trace his transformation from an eerie spirit-like being in Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, to the embodiment of childhood in the play Peter Pan,
preliminary to the character as we know him from the novel *Peter and Wendy* and the following various adaptations. Furthermore, in addition to providing some answers to questions on what and who Peter Pan is and why he transforms dramatically in between the first two works in which he appears, I hope to have also brought out relevant reasons for the fascination we seem to have with this character and why we find him so charming.
Peter Hollindale writes in his introduction to *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (2008) that the stories, originally published in the *Little White Bird*, were intended for adults. According to Hollindale it was not until 1906, in the wake of the play, that the chapters on Peter Pan were extracted from the *Little White Bird* and published separately as *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. Being originally a character created for adult readers, the first Peter Pan is very different from the Peter we are introduced to later, the one in the play. He is in many ways a darker Peter. He is described as a “Betwixt-and-Between” (Barrie, *Kensington Gardens* 17) by Solomon Caw, as a “tragic boy” (Barrie, *Kensington Gardens* 62) by the narrator, and the stories of how he erects tombstones for the children who get lost in the garden after lock-out, the ones who he is too late to save, portray him as a caretaker or guardian of the children.

Everything about Peter’s character in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* suggests that he is a spirit, the ghost of a child. In the story Barrie gives the island in the Serpentine river, which runs through Kensington Gardens, an important role as the place where birds hatch eggs and create new lives, the birds turning into little children who later become someone’s little boy or girl. The birds are therefore the spirits of children who are not yet born. The narrator informs us that some of the birds also have the important role of being the spirits of children who have died: “house-swallows are the spirits of little children who have died” (64). The narrator takes this moment to further inform us that Peter Pan is particularly kind to them perhaps because they tend to “build in the eaves of the houses where they lived when they were humans, and sometimes they try to fly in at a nursery window” (64). It is obvious that the author wants us to recognize that Peter relates to them; the author creates a parallel.

In *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Peter is described as having “escaped from being a human when he was seven days old” (12). His escape out the window, which has no bars, is then detailed
and at the sight of the treetops in Kensington Gardens he immediately forgets that he is human (13). He flies to the Kensington Gardens and is surprised when he finds that both fairies and birds flee from him. He then flies to the island in the Serpentine where he is confronted by Solomon and told that he is not fully human anymore, nor can he be a bird again. Based on this idea alone it can easily be hypothesized that what Barrie meant by Peter’s escape from being human is that Peter died. By making this small adjustment to the understanding of this work, everything takes on a whole new meaning. In this new assumption, Peter being a “Betwixt-and-Between” simply means that he is neither alive, nor has he moved on, but rather that he is stuck between worlds, not able to move either way. Thus he can always remain the same age yet move with the times (Barrie, Kensington Gardens 12). In that sense the Serpentine Island is also given a new role. No longer simply an island where birds hatch their young, it has furthermore become a kind of destination for lost souls, a place which decides whether you are to be reborn or whether you are to remain stuck in-between, like Peter. Kensington Gardens can similarly be interpreted as a kind of final resting place for children who die young, a kind of heaven.

The fact that J. M. Barrie originally intended the stories of Peter Pan for adults in his publication The Little White Bird simply works to reinforce these assumptions. A child would not pick up on the subtle hints, a child would simply see this as a magnificent fairy world and the adventures of Peter the adventures of a young boy let loose without parental supervision, having adventures, which enabled Barrie to extract the Peter Pan chapters from The Little White Bird and publish them separately in Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens without making many adjustments to the text. However, an adult would pick up on these hints, the danger in a young child staying behind in the gardens, the melancholia of Peter never reuniting with his mother and his tragic presence in the gardens, and perhaps it was for their benefit, rather than the children’s, that Barrie created Peter. Peter Hollindale describes this skill of the author to connect to both audiences in his introduction to Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens. There he describes it as the author’s ability to
wink over the heads of the children to the adults and simultaneously over the adults’ heads to the children (xxiii). It is also entirely possible that Barrie wanted to create a vision for the adults, something to hold on to, an image of a happy child at play in a most magical place filled with fairies and adventures on the Serpentine. It could have something to do with the loss of his brother, who died in an accident in 1867, then thirteen years of age. His mother was inconsolable after the loss of the young boy and memories of that time could have easily made its way into the creation of Peter Pan.

There is a darker side of the Peter in Kensington Gardens, a more melancholic Peter who is alone and shunned, a Peter who belongs neither to the fairy world nor the world of humans. He is the Peter who erects tombstones for children who got lost in the Gardens after lockout, the Peter who initially tries to lure Maimie Mannerling away, although he does end up telling her to hurry back so that she will not suffer the same terrible fate as he did.

In chapter 6, Peter’s goat, Maimie has disobeyed her ayah, and stayed behind in the Gardens after lockout time. Peter finds her and they talk and she praises his cleverness and tells him he is brave and they share a kiss and then quite a few more, and eventually Peter asks her if she would like to marry him (59). They are planning to go away together to the island in the Serpentine until Maimie starts to mention her mother. At first Peter is a selfish boy and lies to her that she will always be able to go back to her mother but eventually he cannot lie to her anymore and tells her the truth as he knows it from experience. She cannot bear the thought of not seeing her mother again so she goes home after having a sort of fairy wedding with Peter (57-65).

In all of Peter’s adventures he is always described as a rather attractive boy in the sense that he is brave and has adventures and he is polite to girls and most women who have grown up have motherly affections towards him, which is understandable since the Kensington Gardens Peter is only seven days old. In his attraction, he is able to lure Maimie away from her mother, creating a
kind of danger. Maimie is never claimed by her ayah or her mother, she has run away and she runs back home. She stays overnight in the Gardens, which is a threat to her health, and in the morning, she is confronted by Peter, who tries to lure her to stay with him. In that sense Peter becomes a kind of threat to her life, trying to turn her into a “Betwixt-and-Between” child like himself.

The melancholic way in which Peter is never reunited with his mother is a further reinforcement of the hypothesis that the Kensington Gardens Peter is a spirit. The fairies grant Peter his wish to be able to fly to return to his mother (37). However, when he gets there he is reluctant to wake her up as she sleeps and calls his name. He is torn between wanting to be his mother’s boy again and wanting to be free and sail his boat one more time (39). The way she sleeps the entire time he is there and never wakes up reinforces the fact that they do not belong to the same world. He is there, he can see his mother, is aware of her, wants to make her happy by returning to her but he can never completely fulfill this want; not because he does not want to but because he is not able to. This is presented as his chance to reunite with his mother, but she is never aware of his presence except as the faint whisper of a reply. She has already lost him and he is unable to return to her. Peter tries again to return to his mother, using his second wish. By the time he arrives his mother has had another child and though Peter cries and throws himself against the iron bars that have now been placed on the nursery windows, his mother is not even aware of his presence. The two scenes are eerie, as if he were a little ghost boy, like the house-swallows described by the narrator. The fact is that as much as he would like to become a real boy again, he cannot. He tries to act like a real boy and play like a real boy but he is frozen in time; he needs directions from Maimie to learn to play like a real boy: he is never fully realised as a boy.

Perhaps the darkest image of Peter that we are introduced to, however, is presented to us in the very last lines of the work.
But how strange for parents, when they hurry into the Gardens at the opening of the gates looking for their lost one, to find the sweetest little tombstone instead. I do hope that Peter is not too ready with his spade. It is all rather sad. (65)

These last lines give a representation of Peter that has not been introduced before. In the last couple of pages of the work he is described as racing around Kensington Gardens on his goat, trying to locate missing children and bring them to the house built by the fairies so that they may stay warm and be rescued by their parents in the morning (64-65). However, not all the children live to see the light of the next day and the author uses the opportunity to present us with a Peter who in his naiveté and desire to do what real boys do comes around to bury the bodies of the poor children who do not survive, with his spade, thus creating an opposite between Peter as a caretaker of lost souls and Peter as a grave digger. The author also presents the possibility that Peter is rather hasty in his judgment of who has passed and hopes that Peter is not too quick to bury them, which creates a contradiction in his character.

As mentioned above Barrie himself had suffered loss in his childhood and a lot of the characteristics of Peter Pan can be linked directly to this particular loss and the effects it had on his personal life. The Peter of Kensington Gardens could be a direct result of this, a kind of little boy who has been lost to his family through the act of death, but lives on forever, never aging, ever present, the helpful caretaker of lost little souls in the resting place of Kensington Gardens. It is also quite possible that he created Peter simply out of the joy of creating stories and his extraordinary way of seeing something magical about the mundane things around him. He was a frequent visitor of Kensington Gardens, and Peter Hollindale suggests in his introduction to Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens that The Little White Bird is a fantasized version of Barrie himself and the effect he had on the Llewelyn Davies family (xix), which will be further detailed in the chapter on his personal life. However, it is clear that the Peter presented in The Little White Bird is a lot
different from the Peter we know from the play and the one introduced later in *Peter Pan and Wendy*. 
Peter Pan in London Theatre

Peter Pan and Childhood

In his dedication of the Peter Pan play to the five boys of the Llewelyn Davies family to whom J. M. Barrie had taken a fancy, Barrie wrote “The play of Peter is streaky with you still” (75). What he was most likely referring to was the games he used to play with the boys and the stories he would tell them about Peter Pan and his adventures and how many of them wound up in the play. To name one example from Peter Hollindale’s introduction to the collection of plays by Barrie, he was fascinated by “wrecked islands” and he made them the “subject of his summer games with the Llewelyn Davies children” (xxi). His islands provided the perfect setting for the relocation of Peter Pan to Never Land, a fictional island crawling with Indians and pirates. His games with the boys were clearly an inspiration to him.

Barrie also writes in his dedication to the young boys “I have no recollection of having written it” (75). Eventually he decides that perhaps he did write it after all, reminiscing about the process of his creation, the memories of the times he and the boys spent together being the “boy castaways of Black Lake Island” (80). And after all, this is the root of Peter Pan’s creation and his entire reason for being: memories of childhood.

Most children growing up know who Peter Pan is. He is the boy who is never going to grow up. How fascinating a character he is to a child: he can fly, lives on a magic island and has wonderful adventures and he never ever has to go to school or do chores or brush his teeth and go to bed. And then they grow up and realise how silly it is to be uneducated and how dangerous flying can be and how unhygienic it is never to brush your teeth. And soon Peter Pan, like most of their childhood memories, becomes nothing more than a faint whisper, a story to tell their own
children. And that is exactly how Peter Pan gets passed around the generations in the play, or rather in the afterthought premiered in 1908 in London.

In the new addition titled “An Afterthought: When Wendy grew up”, the audience got to witness for the first time when Peter arrived in the old nursery and met Wendy as a grown woman. Exactly like Wendy had outgrown Peter, so we outgrow our childhoods and regenerate them through having children of our own. Peter meeting Wendy’s daughter Jane is therefore a perfect example of him as the embodiment of childhood. He regenerates through their generations exactly like childhood itself. It is like Wendy says in the last few lines of the play: “and when she grows up I will hope she will have a little daughter, who will fly away with him in turn – and in this way may I go on for ever and ever, dear Nana, so long as children are young and innocent” (1.1.254-58). Barrie further strengthens this idea by the way he sets up the scene to mirror the one in the very same nursery, many years earlier, with the same little boy but a different little girl.

“Boy, why are you crying?” (1.1.227) is one of the more famous lines in the play and it actually appears twice. It is the first line that Wendy says to Peter when he has lost his shadow in her bedroom, and it is also the first thing that Jane says to Peter, when she discovers him in her bedroom.

Barrie also provided a myriad of other examples of Peter’s disembodiment and relation to childhood. This new Peter Pan, the Peter Pan of the play, is in many ways different from the Peter in the original stories. One of the chief differences of the character was introduced in a 1928 revision of the text by Barrie himself (Hollindale, Explanatory Notes 313n351). To the nursery scene, where Peter and Wendy meet for the first time, Barrie added:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PETER} & \quad \text{You mustn’t touch me.} \\
\text{WENDY} & \quad \text{Why?} \\
\text{PETER} & \quad \text{No one must ever touch me.}
\end{align*}
\]
WENDY  Why?

PETER  I don’t know.

(He is never touched by any one in the play) (1.1.351-56)

One has to wonder what Barrie meant with his late addition of such a crucial sentence that changes the entire way the reader views the text and the character. It can be argued that what he meant to do was to give Peter a more elusive quality. Not being able to touch him is a confirmation that he is an idea or concept and does not really exist. This is in strong contrast to the Kensington Gardens Peter who is a much more tangible character. The fact that Peter Pan is never touched is so subtle that we almost do not notice it, which further strengthens the idea that Barrie always intended Peter as an embodiment of childhood although it was not until 1928 that he actually verbalized it. The fact that he only inserted this scene but did not have to make further additional adjustments shows that it was always present in the text; it simply had to be pointed out.

One of Barrie’s more clever ways to make sure that we are kept guessing is the fact that he insinuates touch without having it ever being fulfilled. An example of this is in Act 1 when Wendy asks Peter to give her a kiss but before they are even able to Tinker Bell the fairy pulls on Wendy’s hair so that the kiss, or touch, never actually happens (1.1.466-69). This happens again later in the play when they are in danger on the rock which is about to be submerged under water and Wendy is to fly away alone on a kite. In the author’s commentary, rather than inserting it into the actual dialogue, the author has written: “She holds out her mouth to Peter, but he knows they cannot do that” (3.1 p. 124). In the same scene the fact that Peter is an illusion is further reinforced by a small comment made by the author on the fact that only Wendy can fly away on the kite: “She knows very well that if it can lift her it can lift him also, for she has been told by the
boys as a deadly secret that one of the queer things about him is that he is no weight at all. But it is a forbidden subject” (3.1 p. 124). Not only can he not be touched, but he has no weight at all.

Another identifying feature of the illusion that Peter is, lies in his ability to pretend things. He is the master of playing pretend; he is best at it. He is sometimes so good at it that he actually believes the things that he is pretending. “Hook wounded me twice. (He believes it; he is so good at pretend that he feels the pain, his arms hang limp) I can neither swim nor fly” (3.1.163-65). In fact, he is so obsessed with playing pretend that everybody around him must also play, even when he is not there. “He insists that the pretend meals should be partaken of with gusto, and we see his band doing their best to obey orders” (4.1.54-56). Furthermore, the author notes that Wendy is “not absolutely certain even now that he does eat the other kind, though no one appears to do it more heartily” (4.1. 52-54). Here is yet another fact to further support the idea that Peter Pan is an illusion; it seems that he does not even need real food to sustain him.

In the act where Hook has captured Wendy and the Lost Boys and attempted to poison Peter two new important examples of Peter’s disembodied state are introduced. In the scene where Peter fights Hook, the author has written, “[Hook] does not, especially in the most heated moments, quite see Peter, who to his eyes, now blurred or opened clearly for the first time, is less like a boy than a mote of dust dancing in the sun” (5.1 p. 145). While Hook is fighting Peter, he seems to lose the ability to see him for a while: he is simply not there. Following these lines, Hook enquires of Peter who and what he is, to which Peter himself replies: “I’m youth, I’m joy, I’m a little bird that has broken out of the egg” (5.1.197-98). Peter himself has therefore said it: he is youth. Perhaps what Barrie intended for the audience with this scene was simply to remind us that Peter has the advantage of youth over Hook. However, it is also likely that he wanted to remind us that Peter is disembodied and Hook is really fighting youth. What is also interesting here is that Peter acknowledges the original Peter, the Kensington Gardens Peter, in his comment about being a bird.
In the final lines of the play Barrie leaves the audience with one last indication that Peter Pan is an illusion. In his author’s comments he writes: “You can’t see Peter if you are old. They think he is a draught at the corner” (5.2 p. 151). The comment refers to the people in the street who are too old to see Peter as he hovers above it at Wendy’s window. Wendy’s mother is also deemed too old by Barrie, even though she is “the loveliest age for a woman” (5.2 p. 151). She calls out to Peter and knows he exists but she can never see him. However, in Barrie’s 1908 addition, when we are introduced to Wendy as a grown woman, she can still see Peter. More interestingly, she can also feel him. In fact, the Peter we are introduced to in the afterthought leaps onto her knee, touches her cheek, kisses her. It is a contradiction to the hypothesis that Barrie intended Peter to be a disembodied interpretation of childhood but it can also be argued that Wendy is an exception. She is a chief character in the play and in a way the play is a coming-of-age story about Wendy. The afterthought is even titled, “When Wendy Grew Up”. As will be discussed below, Wendy seems to be holding on to her childhood when she encounters Peter again in her life. An important role for Peter is to symbolise all childhood, for the adult members of the audience and for children growing up. An even more important role for Peter is to symbolise Wendy’s childhood in particular. It can be argued that she never fully lets go of her childhood and so she is still able to see Peter and feel him although she is no longer a little girl.

Jacqueline Rose wrote an interesting book on Peter Pan titled The Case of Peter Pan: The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction (1993). In her book she seeks to answer the question of what the meaning of Peter Pan is for the readers. In a way she inspired many of the points being made in this essay on the disembodiment of Peter and the concept of childhood, particularly where she writes, “It is because Peter Pan can never be touched that he remains forever disembodied” (Rose xv). One of Rose’s most important ideas can be found in the first lines of the conclusion of her book: “Instead of asking what children want, or need, from literature, this book has asked what it is that adults, through literature, want or demand of the child” (137). Supposing then that what
Barrie really wanted to do was to write an adventure for children that would also remind adults of what it was like to be young, Peter Pan thus became the perfect tool for Barrie to get his message across. Essentially, what Barrie ended up doing was to personify childhood. Peter Pan never grows up so he never loses his childhood, unlike we do. He is forgetful as children can be; he forgets to come and get Wendy for spring cleaning their second year. He has a strange childlike outlook on death, his inability to understand it. When Wendy has been shot out of the sky and lies motionless on the ground the author notes: “Wendy is dead. (He is not so much pained as puzzled)” (2.1.233). He is ever so attractive; he lures Wendy away from her home and her parents with promises of mermaids and stories of how wonderful being in Never Land will be. Barrie goes as far as describing him as being dangerous (1.1 p. 102). Peter Pan is also completely removed from sexual content. He explains to Tinker Bell that she cannot be his fairy because he is a gentleman and she a lady (1.1.435-36). The audience knows what Peter does not know, that Tinker Bell, Wendy and later the Indian princess Tiger Lily are all romantically interested in him. His resistance of their romantic interest is sincere. He is simply too innocent to understand it. Wendy asks him what his feelings for her are, to which he replies: “Those of a devoted son, Wendy” (4.1.122). Peter Pan also has other qualities that are naïve and childlike. He has a tendency to switch sides when he feels one side is losing unfairly and it is easy for Hook to trick Peter into playing games with him, which Peter often loses. Most importantly, Peter himself is chivalrous and very fair minded. In the author’s directions to the fight scene on the rock between the Lost Boys and the pirates Barrie has written: “Peter is untouched, but unfairness is what he can never get used to, and in his bewilderment he rolls off the rock” (3.1 p. 123). In short, Peter’s childish sense of fair play puts him at a disadvantage when it comes to fighting Hook.

What is it then that we as adults demand of Peter Pan, and in turn of our children? Peter Pan is the personification of our childhoods. He has qualities that bring back memories: he has the adventures that we used to have and he lives in a make-believe world where even the food you
eat is pretence. He taunts us on the fact that we ended up growing up, no matter how much we planned on not doing it as children. The demand we put on Peter Pan as a character is the same demand as we unknowingly put on our children: we wish to relive our own childhoods through our children.

**Fighting and Flirting with Youth: Hook and Wendy introduced**

The fact that the Peter Pan from the play can be interpreted as a personification of youth and childhood has already been introduced and established. But what does that mean for some of the other chief characters in the play? Peter as the main protagonist has very important relationships with two characters in the play, Captain James Hook and Wendy. Hook is the main antagonist of the play and is always plotting to get rid of Peter and consequently the Lost Boys with him. Peter and Hook have a history together. It was Peter who cut off Hook’s hand and fed it to the crocodile. They also have at least two significant fights in the play. Wendy is the other, perhaps somewhat more subtle, protagonist of the play. The play begins with a conflict in Wendy’s house and it ends with her safe return to her parents. She is persuaded by Peter to fly away with him to Never Land and she is fascinated by him, to the point where he has become of a romantic interest for her. He cannot reciprocate the feeling, however, and eventually Wendy realizes that she must return home.

The assumption that Peter is a personification of youth and childhood makes a significant difference to the other characters. Wendy’s selfish flight from the nursery to an imaginary world where she forgets all about her ties to London, her parents and everything, can be interpreted as the identity crisis of an adolescent who is not quite a child but not quite adult either. Peter thus becomes her escape, her flirtation with her own childhood and eventually her realization that we all have duties and we cannot escape forever growing up. For Captain Hook Peter represents
youth and joy, which Hook as an adult envies. Hook fears his death, represented by the crocodile which chases him around demanding the rest of him, the way old age and death is an inevitable thing which will eventually catch up with us all. Consequently Hook chases after Peter at the same time as he flees from the crocodile, a scene rather reminiscent of an adult’s mid-life crisis. Hook has ample opportunities to kill Peter but is never quite able to. Most importantly, in their final death scene, he has problems seeing Peter, which can either mean that Peter is not there, or even that Hook is becoming so old that he is losing his ability to see Peter, even if he is an inhabitant of Never Land.

For Wendy, what seems to be the trigger of her flight to Never Land is the fact that her father throws the nanny, who is a Newfoundland dog, to the doghouse for the night, consequently leaving Wendy, as the eldest, responsible for her brothers. This is further reinforced by the fact that she does not leave for Never Land with Peter by herself, but rather begs him to also teach her brothers to fly and takes them with her (1.1.102-03). Had Nana been left in the nursery with the children there would not have been an adventure. Wendy seems to be shunning what she knows she should do, and is rather tempted by Peter to be reckless and have fun. Peter is thus the tempter but it is the lure of being childish and having no responsibilities, rather than simply the charm of Peter, that really entices Wendy. However, at the same time as she is trying to escape from responsibility and growing up she is also playing pretend that she is grown up. It is a way for her to feel what it is like to be grown up in a completely safe environment. The Lost Boys are not hers after all, so the pressure of failure is off.

The rift in her and Peter’s relationship comes when she takes her playing pretend too far in his opinion, when she gives him the role of “father”. Peter loves playing pretend, so he goes along with it for a bit, but eventually it starts to scare him: “It is only pretend, isn’t it, that I am their father?” (4.1.113). If Peter is childhood then it can be understood that Wendy’s mistake is to try to make the two connect. She cannot stay with Peter – stay a child forever – if she is so fascinated
by growing up and having children and a husband. Peter can never be what Wendy wants him to be to her because it is not possible to change him. And eventually Peter is also the one to reveal to her that if she continues to stay in Never Land her mother and father will forget about her. In short, her staying away and being reckless and childish will eventually make the world she used to belong to, the one her parents belong to, fade to the back of her memory and become unavailable to her. Furthermore she cannot make him go with her. Peter himself says: “I just want always to be a little boy and to have fun” (4.1.236-37). This can also be seen in the scene where Peter has raced ahead to bar the window so that the children will not be able to return home. He sees Mrs. Darling sitting by the piano, crying because she misses Wendy so much. Peter says: “She is awfully fond of Wendy. I am fond of her too. We can’t both have her, lady!” (5.2.68-70). This shows the conflict that Wendy is in the middle of. She cannot continue to be a child and grow up at the same time, no matter how much she wants to.

After the children have returned Peter is confronted by Mrs. Darling, who, although she cannot see him, still offers him to come live with them, and grow up there. He does not like the idea but tries to lure Wendy away again. She wants to go with him but her mother does not like the idea. However, she authorizes Wendy to return in one year for spring-cleaning. Wendy and Peter are next seen together in the small house in Never Land. Two rather important things are different. Wendy is both taller than she used to be and she now has to use a broomstick because she cannot fly so well anymore. Barrie’s director’s notes once again also inform us that “she does not see him quite so clearly now as she used to do” (5.2.188-189). She is growing up and losing her childhood.

In the novel Peter and Wendy, which Barrie wrote in 1911, seven years after the original staging of the play Peter Pan, this scene is taken even further. Barrie mentions there that Peter Pan misses a year and then comes again to bring Wendy to Never Land, not realizing that he has skipped a whole year in between. After that he never shows again (220). He writes that Wendy tried for a while not to grow up for Peter’s sake but we as readers should not feel sorry for Wendy because
“she was one of the kind that likes to grow up” (220). This is the point that Barrie has a tendency to emphasize with Wendy. It is the reason for the conflict within her character, and what makes her story so special to us. She is always a little caretaker, taking care of Peter and the Lost Boys in Never Land and her brothers, and is very good at being their mother; only, she is perhaps not ready to be a mother in real life, which creates the struggle. It is a coming-of-age for Wendy. And eventually she does note that Peter will continue coming for her daughter, and her granddaughter, and that was always what she intended.

Hook and Peter also share a complicated relationship. In the first encounter with Hook in the play, he is described as a courteous pirate who has an unusual fear of seeing his own blood (2.1 p. 108). In a conversation with Smee, he gives an insight into his hatred for Peter Pan who cut off Hook’s arm and fed it to the crocodile who has followed Hook around ever since. The crocodile is in this scenario a clear metaphor for death; he follows Hook around but Hook always escapes him because “he swallowed a clock, and it goes tick, tick, tick, tick inside him” (2.1.133-34). The clock represents the way Hook feels that his time is slowly wasting away and Smee notes that, “Some day the clock will run down, and then [the crocodile will] get you” (2.1.137-38). Eventually Hook’s days will be numbered and death will catch up with him. It is therefore fitting that in his final scene, the battle on the pirate ship, Hook meets his fate in the jaws of the crocodile.

Whereas the crocodile represents death, Peter represents youth. In the director’s notes Barrie observes that “there is something in Peter that at all times goads this extraordinary man to frenzy; it is the boy’s cockiness, which disturbs Hook like an insect” (4.1 p. 134). In other words, his hatred of Peter is in his very nature. He pursues Peter the way a man who fears death pursues youth. At the same time he fails each and every time to kill Peter although he has ample opportunities. He knows where Peter and the Lost Boys live but is unable to order a raid on their home. He merely claws at Peter in their battle on the rock but is unable to fully go through with the killing. When he and Peter are alone on the island he wriggles down one of the tree entrances to kill Peter, who is
unarmed, whereas Hook is fully armed. However the author once again notes important character information in the director’s notes: “What really warps him is a presentiment that he is about to fail” (4.1 p. 136). He knows he is about to fail before he fails because he knows there is no way he can win, he cannot be rid of Peter Pan. In their final battle Hook is unable to kill Peter with his claw because he “seems to find nothing to tear at” (5.1 p. 145). As has also been noted in this essay, Hook has problems seeing Peter Pan in this battle, which prompts him to enquire who and what Peter is. He eventually realizes that it really is him or Peter this time around and that Peter is the thing that will finally finish him off and so he accepts his fate with some pride as he falls into the welcoming jaws of the crocodile. Perhaps what Barrie wanted to present us with was a proud man struggling with his life. Whereas Wendy, true to the message that Barrie wants to get across, has children and thus has a chance to take part in their childhood adventures and relive her own, Hook is alone and has not produced a child of his own. Not only is his life soon to be over but his childhood is likewise long gone. It is therefore not unusual that his greatest irritation is childhood itself; it is the realization that when the crocodile finally catches up with him, everything about him is finished. In a scene set on the pirate ship, when he feels that the end may be near and makes his dying speech, he exclaims, “No little children love me” (5.1.46).

When Barrie created a play out of the Little White Bird character Peter Pan, he made some significant changes. Whereas the Kensington Gardens Peter Pan was essentially the spirit of a baby who got stuck between his human self and his bird self, a kind of caretaker spirit for other lost little souls, the Never Land Peter Pan became a different kind of spirit. He represents Hook’s lost childhood and the loss he undoubtedly feels at never having had children of his own. He also represents Wendy’s childhood and the fact that she too is about to lose hers and the way childhood is regenerated through having children of your own. For years Peter has been the symbol of childhood. Adults, watching one of the movies or reading the books may think whether or not they have lost theirs. Barrie also transformed the storyline and gave Peter a new setting in
the mind of children, for the Never Land can be found within the minds of children. Many critics believe that his transformation, giving Peter new adventures, was a part of his wanting to continue sharing Peter with his five little friends who were rapidly growing up and were no longer amused by birds and fairies.
J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys

J. M. Barrie’s life was shadowed with grief and loss. Despite his youthful and everlasting boyish appearance, as described in Peter Hollindale’s introduction to *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, photographs of him at the age of sixty already showed a much older man, beaten and bent by the loss of his brother, mother, his friends the Llewelyn Davies and three out of five of their sons to whom he was a guardian (Wullschläger 142). He had lived his life as an outsider from society, quite as if he never fitted in. In an interesting collective biography of some of the best Victorian and Edwardian writers of England titled *Inventing Wonderland*, Jackie Wullschläger gives important insight into the lives of these writers and what drove them to create their amazing works of fiction. What is most prominent in her introduction to the work is the fact that what drove these writers to create their fantasy works was their longing for childhood. In fact, she likens all the writers to Peter Pan: “Each was a boy who did not want to grow up, who remained in part always a child” (5).

In her introduction, Wullschläger mentions possible reasons behind this need for childhood and this inability to grow up, loss and difficult childhoods being key issues. Barrie certainly had his share of loss and his childhood was far from being a happy one. When he was six his brother David died in a skating accident and their mother Margaret took his loss very badly. She retreated to her room and Barrie took it upon himself to imitate his brother David, his mannerisms and particularly his whistle, to attempt to cheer up his mother (Wullschläger 120). In his introduction to the play *Peter Pan*, Hollindale quotes Andrew Birkin’s biography *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys*, revealing that it was Margaret’s comfort that David would forever remain a boy in his death (ix). The earliest Peter Pan, the Peter Pan from Kensington Gardens, clearly references this biographical detail in the way that he, too, forever remains a boy, frozen in time.
Barrie drew inspiration from the personal things that happened to him in many of his works. The character Tommy in *Tommy and Grizel* is believed to have been based on Barrie, particularly in the way that he is “unable to love, unable to experience sexual feeling, unable to grow up”, according to Hollindale in his introduction to *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (xv). In *Inventing Wonderland*, Wullschläger describes Barrie’s fear of becoming an adult. He had no interest in women, he was short and youthful, and “continued to look like a pre-pubescent boy” (121). A further example of his childish behaviour was the fact that he was forever described as a sexless man. Although he was posthumously suspected of being a paedophile there was never any proof that he had sexual feelings towards the boys and in fact Nico, the youngest, swore to a biographer that there was no hint of paedophilia about him. He was simply not interested in sex (Wullschläger 125). He was even incapable of having relations with his wife and they never had any children. Instead he fulfilled his need for the company of children by becoming a sort of uncle, and later guardian, of the Llewelyn Davies boys, whom he met on a stroll in Kensington Gardens (Wullschläger 128).

Whereas Peter himself was clearly inspired by the trauma Barrie suffered from the loss of his brother, and in turn the loss of his childhood through having to grow up quickly and take on the difficult task of consoling his mother, the adventures of Peter were clearly inspired by the five boys to whom Barrie took such an instant fancy. Barrie himself wrote in his dedication of the play to the five young boys that he “made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together” (75). In the dedication Barrie also explains that the reason why he wrote Peter Pan down on paper and produced it as a play was a desperate attempt to “retain the five of you a little longer” (76) and was inspired by the fact that the boys were slowly but surely ceasing to believe the stories.

The idea that Peter was founded on the basis of the loss of childhood and the need to hold on to that childhood has already been hypothesized. Furthermore it has been established that he wrote the work for himself and for the five boys to hold on to the magic and attempt to make them
believe just a little while longer. However, possibly the most important inspiration for Peter Pan occurred to Barrie when he was a grown man in 1922, sixty-two years of age. He wrote an important line in his notebook: “It is as if long after writing Peter Pan its true meaning came to me – desperate attempt to grow up but can’t” (qtd. in Wullschläger 133). He had spent his life as an onlooker to the Llewelyn Davies family and in 1910 when Sylvia passed away, he became the single, legal guardian of the five boys, or as Wullschläger notes: “as close to a live, adult version of Peter Pan as could be imagined” (Wullschläger 137).

The reason for Barrie’s transformation of Peter from a lost little spirit in Kensington Gardens to the pre-teen embodiment of childhood in the play had a lot to do with the Llewelyn Davies boys. In fact Peter Hollindale writes in his introduction to Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens that the reason behind the creation of the new Peter was the fact that the boys were growing up and were slowly growing out of stories of fairies and birds. Pirates and redskins proved a much more fascinating subject for an older audience (xviii). Slowly Peter Pan as we are most familiar with him was created. It is therefore not surprising that Barrie wrote in his dedication that he had no recollection of having written the play; Peter Pan as we know him simply grew out of the adventures he had shared with the boys, the stories he had told them to keep them riveted as they matured and grew. In his dedication Barrie writes about another publication, a picture book of the adventures he and the boys shared one summer near Barrie’s cottage in Sussex, titled The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island. Barrie writes that the chapter-headings of The Boy Castaways “anticipate much of the play of Peter Pan” (82). In the same dedication he also explains his desperate attempt to hold on to them a little longer with regards to their belief in his stories, much in the same way as Peter gathers about him a group of boys, the Lost Boys, who share his reluctance to grow up: “My grandest triumph, the best thing in the play of Peter Pan ... is that long after No. 4 had ceased to believe, I brought him back to the faith for at least two minutes” (85-86). Ironically the play ends with Wendy bringing each and every lost boy back with her to
grow up and become a man, leaving Peter Pan on the outside looking in, much as Barrie himself had his moments with the boys and watched them grow up and become men while he himself was left behind; or as Wullschläger writes, “the outsider looking in at the Llewelyn Davies family” (133).

This leads us to the next piece in the puzzle of the character of Peter Pan. He was inspired by Barrie’s own little Lost Boys and the very fact that he is stuck in an everlasting childhood seems to be a result of the death of David and their mother’s obsession with him, and the fact that he would never grow up. However Barrie himself also proved to be an inspiration for Peter Pan, more than he could imagine himself when he was writing the work. Upon comparing Peter Pan to Barrie it is not difficult to establish parallels and patterns. Both were childish and had a problem with growing up. Both enjoyed games and make-believe and stories. Both were possibly completely removed from sexual content. Peter is an asexual character; he is innocent and does not understand the sexual advances of Wendy, Tiger Lily and Tinker Bell. Barrie was also described as an asexual person, unable to produce a child with his wife or possibly even consummate their marriage (Wullschläger 123). Even Barrie’s fixation on young mothers and little girls who play pretend that they are grown up, just like his own mother had done, made its way into the play in the form of Wendy, as Hollindale explains in his introduction to Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (xii). Even the fact that Peter was replaced by another little boy suggests Barrie’s own replacement of David in his mother’s life. Peter Pan reeks of Barrie’s personal life, it is carefully woven into every detail of the play and the character; they are like two sides of the same coin.

Before abandoning the subject of Barrie and his life, one question must be raised and answered. Is Peter the only character in the play that is reminiscent of Barrie? Can we also detect the faintest glimmer of Barrie in Captain James Hook? The fact is that Peter and Hook appear as parallel characters, Peter as youth and Hook as old age. It is entirely possible that at the core of Captain Hook lies a fragment of Barrie’s personality, the other side of the coin. Barrie himself wrote in his
dedication that Hook is “held by those in the know to be autobiographical” (82). Barrie himself appears to have been a child trapped inside an adult’s body as has been suggested by his childish appearance, his love for adventures and make believe and his finding companionship in children. His adult self could very well have resented the loss of his childhood, much in the same way that Hook resents Peter. It is parallel to Barrie’s own chase after childhood and presents us with the idea that Barrie wrote himself into the play in this manner. He even makes Hook lament his childlessness, a trait which Barrie himself also suffered from.

Peter Pan is not a singular person in reality, someone we can point to and say, “this is Peter”. As has already been established he was created out of a mixture of events and persons that affected Barrie. It is therefore entirely possible to hypothesize that Barrie created Peter out of the need to hold on to childhood, both his own childhood and that of the five boys whom he adored. They allowed him to tell stories and play games and the loss of that must have been horrible for him to imagine. Thus Peter is not a person but an idea: a feeling. He is childhood, sprung out of the need for childhood and Hook is his counterpart, old age. In making Peter triumph over Hook and letting the crocodile finally catch up with Hook, Barrie seems to accept or rather let the viewers and readers accept the fact that all children do grow up. It is a fact that speaks to both of Barrie’s audiences, children and adults. Although children wish to retain their childhood and adults experience a nostalgic feeling towards theirs they “consent gratefully to the natural rhythms of time and growth and change”, as Peter Hollindale writes in his introduction to Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (xxvii).
Conclusion

Quite often and unexpectedly a story writes itself. The author sets off with a specific idea and then the idea takes over and some things seem inevitable and before he or she knows it they have a work in their hands that has ended up being nothing like they originally intended. Perhaps that is what Barrie meant by saying that he had no memory of ever having written Peter Pan. Originally Barrie intended Peter Pan as a character created for adult readers, an adult audience. The adventures Peter had in *The Little White Bird* almost read as a cautionary tale and a tale of comfort at the same time. However his most precious audience, the Llewelyn Davies boys soon grew out of the adventures of Peter. They became too old for fairies and birds. And so Peter grew up with them, but just the tiniest bit, and started having real adventures. All of a sudden Peter was removed from their close neighbourhood to far, far away in Never Land and surrounded by pirates and Indians. Peter Pan is certainly streaked with Barrie’s original Lost Boys. Not only do the characters have their names but they also have their adventures. Although we can never know what Barrie was thinking when he created Peter Pan, or when he transformed him into the Peter Pan we know today, we can certainly draw our own conclusions. Perhaps Barrie feared that he himself would grow old and forget his stories and have no more time for adventures. Therefore it is quite possible that both Peter Pan and Hook had a claim to Barrie.

There is a point to what Jacqueline Rose says in her book *The Case of Peter Pan*, when she notes that “Peter Pan is a little boy who does not grow up, not because he doesn’t want to, but because someone else prefers he shouldn’t” (3). That someone may well be Barrie. The boys were precious to Barrie and so were their adventures together. Perhaps he wanted to keep a small part of them young forever, young at heart like he was. And so he wrote down their adventures in the hope that others might enjoy them and that they would never forget them. The adventure of Peter as it appears in *The Little White Bird* certainly seems to read as a comfort tale as well as a
cautionary tale and hints in certain ways to Barrie’s brother David. In creating the Peter of the play Barrie seemed to shift the focus from his brother’s death to himself and his own conflicts. It shifts towards being a comfort tale written for himself and any adult who longs for his or her childhood.

It is difficult to determine whom Barrie is speaking to with his creation. He seems to be speaking to four very different audiences or receivers: a child audience, an adult audience, the Llewelyn Davies boys, and himself. He tells us what Peter Pan is and what he should mean to us. To a child audience he says: This is Peter Pan. He can fly and he lives on an island where pirates chase the Lost Boys and Indians chase the pirates and he fights Hook with a sword and good triumphs over evil. To an adult audience, his boys and himself he seems to say: This is what it means to be a child. Please do not forget it.
Works Cited


