

Insights

A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespeare Festival



Peter Pan

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

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Peter Pan

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Synopsis: *Peter Pan*

The Darling household is a place of joy, consisting of the three children, Wendy, John, and Michael; the practical and sometimes stern father, Mr. Darling; the loving mother, Mrs. Darling; and the children's nurse, a dog named Nana.

But sneaking into the children's bedroom at night to listen to Mrs. Darling's bedtime stories is Peter Pan. One night, Nana and Mrs. Darling see him and try to stop him, but are only able to catch his shadow as he flies out the window. So they roll it up and put it in a drawer. Peter, of course, wants his shadow, and returns later after Mr. and Mrs. Darling have left for a dinner party. He brings with him his not-very-polite fairy, Tinker Bell. However, when he finds his shadow, he can't make it stick to him and wakes Wendy as he begins to cry.

Peter is entranced by Wendy and tells her that he had run away the day he was born because he heard his parents talking about all the things he would do when he was a man, and he went to live with the fairies so that he would never have to grow up. Now he lives in the Neverland with the lost boys, children who fell out of their perambulators and were never found again.

Wendy sews Peter's shadow back to him, and then Peter convinces Wendy and her brothers, by teaching them how to fly, to return to the Neverland with him and Tinker Bell. So off they fly, over the rooftops of London to the Neverland, where the lost boys share the island with the mean pirates, led by Captain Hook, and with the very British Picadilly Tribe, led by their chief and princess, Tiger Lily. It was Hook's greatest desire to capture Peter Pan and his friends because it was Peter who had cut off Hook's hand and fed it to a crocodile. The crocodile had so liked the taste of the hand that he followed Hook everywhere, waiting for the rest of him. The crocodile had, unhappily, also swallowed a clock, and its ticking warned Hook of any approach.

To this magical land Wendy and her brothers fly with Peter Pan. The lost boys, seeing Wendy and spurred on by a jealous Tinker Bell, think her a giant bird and shoot her with a bow and arrow. Peter arrives immediately and sees that Wendy is only stunned, and, after banishing Tinker Bell for a week, he tells the others that he has brought Wendy to them. They quickly build her a house and ask her to be their mother. However, Hook and the pirates have their own plans and plant a green poison cake near the new house.

The boys, when they find it, are excited and ready to eat it up, but Wendy, the good and wise mother, stops them and puts them to bed, after singing beautiful lullabies.

The next day, Peter takes Wendy to Marooner's Rock to see the mermaids. While there, the pirates bring in Tiger Lily, who they have bound and are leaving on the rock to drown at high tide. Peter saves her, and she and the rest of the Picadillies become their friends and guardians.

Eventually, the children begin to worry about their parents and to feel the pangs of homesickness; and they decide it is time to return to their warm beds in London. The lost boys decide to go with them, but Peter will not hear of going if he will have to grow up. Hook and the pirates, however, foil their plans and capture all the children and take them to their ship. Only Peter, with Tinker Bell's help, avoids capture.

The pirates are about to have their captives walk the plank, when Peter arrives and saves them. In the final fight with Hook, Peter forces the pirate captain to the edge of the ship where he hears the ticking of the crocodile and, unnerved, falls into its waiting jaws.

The three children then return home, along with the lost boys, who the Darlings adopt. Peter stays in the Neverland, coming to visit Wendy on occasion, but she soon turns into an adult and mostly forgets Peter. However, she has a daughter, Jane, who dreams of pirates, Indians, and magical places far away . . .

Characters: *Peter Pan*

TINKER BELL: A fairy and companion of Peter Pan, Tinker Bell is very rude to Wendy, but mainly out of jealousy because she wants to be more than friends with Peter. Toward the end of the story, she risks her life to save Peter's.

MR. DARLING: The father of Wendy, John, and Michael and husband of Mrs. Darling, Mr. Darling is a stern and unimaginative man. He does, however, love his children and only wants what is best for them.

MRS. DARLING: The mother of the three children and wife of Mr. Darling, Mrs. Darling is loving and imaginative, almost a perfect foil for Mr. Darling. When she was Wendy's age, she, too, visited the Neverland with Peter, but that was long ago, and she has nearly forgotten everything.

WENDY: The oldest of the Darling children, Wendy is a young girl, just beginning to feel the tugs of womanhood. She easily befriends Peter and becomes his and her brothers' surrogate mother.

JOHN: The middle Darling child, John thinks he wants to be a pirate and plays at that much of the time.

MICHAEL: The youngest Darling child, Michael would like to be an Indian.

NANA: The loving and very capable nurse for the Darling children, Nana just happens to be a dog.

PETER PAN: Because he never wanted to grow up, Peter Pan ran away when he was born. He now lives with and is the leader of the lost boys in the Neverland. He can be gentle and kind, but is usually mischievous, selfish, and a little uncaring. He does, however, care for Wendy. In the end he stays in the Neverland, where time stands still.

TOOTLES: One of the lost boys who fell out of his perambulator when a baby, he now lives in the Neverland. He is "not the least brave but the most unfortunate," having been in fewer adventures than the others.

NIBS: Another of the lost boys, Nibs is, in his words, "smart and debonair."

SLIGHTLY: Another of the lost boys, Slightly is "the brightest of the boys" because he can "remember" the days before they were lost.

CURLEY: Another of the lost boys, Curley is usually in trouble with Peter, "guilty or not."

TWIN 1: Another of the lost boys, Twin 1 "cannot be described" because we would probably be describing his brother.

TWIN 2: Ditto.

SKYLIGHTS: A pirate, one of a "villainous looking lot," Skylights and the pirates are all more talk and bombast than action.

CECCO: A pirate, the handsome Cecco "cut his name in letters of blood on the back of the warden of the prison at Gao."

ARNOLD THE BLACK: A pirate, the terrifying Arnold "was once a head master at a boys school."

BILL JUKES: A pirate, Bill was once a "notorious truancy officer."

COOKSON: A pirate, Cookson is "said to be Black Murphy's brother."

GENTLEMAN STARKEY: A pirate, Starkey was "once a principal in public school."

SMEE: A pirate, the Irish Smee is "an oddly genial man who stabbed, so to speak, without offense."

CAPTAIN JAMES HOOK: The captain of the pirate band, Hook is “the largest jewel of the lot.” He hates Peter Pan because Peter cut off his hand in an earlier battle and fed it to the crocodile. Since then Hook has replaced the hand with a menacing hook. However, he is deathly afraid of the crocodile, fearing it would like to finish the meal.

TIGER LILY: Leader and princess of the Piccadilly Tribe (“not to be confused with the softer-hearted Delawares or the Hurons”), Tiger Lily is proud, brave, and beautiful. Like all of her tribe, she has a soft heart and befriends Peter and the lost boys.

GREAT BIG LITTLE PANTHER: Another member of the Piccadilly Tribe.

LEAN WOLF: Another member of the Piccadilly Tribe.

VARIOUS OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PICCADILLY TRIBE

MERMAIDS

THE CROCODILE

JANE: Wendy’s daughter, when Wendy grows up and marries, Jane, too, gets to know Peter Pan.

About the Playwright: Sir James M. Barrie

By Angel M. Pilkington
From *Insights*, 2000

Sir James M. Barrie was born in Kirriemuir, Scotland, to David Barrie and Margaret Ogilvy in 1860. He attended his first school in 1867, a little private school run by two sisters. Later, he spent five years at the Dumfries Academy. On his first day there, a boy came up to him on the playground and asked what his high jump was. Barrie gave a response and asked the boy what his was; this line of questioning went back and forth, and each time the other boy claimed to be better. Then Barrie was asked what his hundred yard time was; Barrie did not know his time and asked the boy for his. The boy responded, “Five seconds less than yours” (Thomas Moulton, Barrie [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928], 8). Barrie saw the joke against himself, and a friendship immediately began.

In 1883 Barrie began his writing career at the Nottingham Journal as a leader-writer. He was able to write on a wide variety of topics, including articles about the theatre such as “Lear’s Fool” and “Stage Tricks” (Moulton 36). Even during the year that he worked at the Nottingham Journal, Barrie was engaged in much other writing, and it was not long before he emerged as a novelist and playwright. His many successes include *A Window in Thrums* (1889), *The Little Minister* (1891), *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896), *Sentimental Tommy* (1896), *Tommy and Grizel* (1900), *Quality Street* (1901), *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), and *Dear Brutus* (1917).

Barrie started to write when he was a child, drawing heavily on his personal experiences. He wrote his first novel, *A Child of Nature*, while he was at Dumfries. Speaking about *A Child of Nature*, Barrie said, “It was a tale of Dumfries. A long thing, one-hundred thousand words” (Moulton 9). The “Hanky School” in his novel *Sentimental Tommy* is a description of the first private school he attended in 1867, and he also drew on that experience for *Quality Street* (James A. Roy, James Matthew Barrie [London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1937], 40 41).

The story of his mother, Margaret Ogilvy, was published one year after her death. Many female characters in Barrie’s novels and plays are based on his mother. Barrie said of Jess in *A Window in Thrums*: “There was never any Jess, anything in her that was rare and beautiful she had from my mother” (Moulton 28). Barrie had a deep admiration for his mother. In 1896,

he said of his novels, “They were written to please one woman who is now dead, but as I am writing a little book about my mother, I shall say no more of her here” (Roy 163).

Barrie is most recognized today for Peter Pan, a character based on the children in Barrie’s life and on Barrie himself. The story of Peter Pan began with a book called *The Little White Bird*, published in 1902. The character, Peter, was introduced as a baby, and he was later developed into the play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up*. The play premiered in 1904, and productions and adaptations of Peter Pan are still common, including Steven Spielberg’s movie, *Hook* (1991).

In recent years Barrie’s reputation has suffered because he is thought to be overly sentimental. However, he had an amazing sense of humor and a gift for realism. In *Portrait of Barrie*, Cynthia Asquith said, “He didn’t want children to take Peter Pan seriously. His favorite reaction to his own play was that of the little boy who, favoured by a seat in the author’s box, and at the end injudiciously asked what he had liked best, promptly replied: ‘What I think I liked best was tearing up the programme and dropping the bits on people’s heads’” ([London: James Barrie, 1954], 219).

In *The Peter Pan Chronicles*, Bruce K. Hanson said, “Poetic and sentimental as he sounds, Barrie always was able to separate feelings from the real-life events that he was writing about.” Sometimes his analysis seems almost cold-blooded. Barrie gave his sister’s fiancé a horse for a wedding present. When the fiancé died from a fall off the horse, Barrie wrote down an idea for a novel. “After death, a character [a la Maggie] talks beautiful resignation, &c. Yet what is the feeling at heart? A kicking at the awfulness? A bitterness? Work this out in novel, showing how almost no one in these cir[cumstances] gets at other’s real feelings. Each conceals from the other” ([New York: Birch Lane Press, 1993], 27).

Sir James Barrie’s work is still popular today because of the many rich elements he took from his own life and the lives of people around him. He believed in the power of emotion, but he also was possessed of an irrepressible humor. He saw the pathos and beauty in humanity, but just as clearly he perceived the confusions and the cruelties. How else could he have made Peter Pan, Wendy, and Captain Hook?

Peter Pan: Myth and Fantasy

By Angel M. Pilkington

From *Midsummer Magazine*, 2000

Some stories are so powerful that they become myths. “Peter Pan, whose horned cap, rural attire, . . . and pan pipes are the only remnants of his descent from the Greek centaur, . . . could not have come about without the cultural obsession with Pan” (Jackie Wullschlager, *Inventing Wonderland* [New York: The Free Press, 1995], 112). As an Edwardian god, Pan is a hero who never ages and has a wild and playful spirit similar to a child; Peter Pan, who in many ways was modeled after the mythical god, has been entrancing audiences for nearly one hundred years with magical creatures such as fairies and mermaids. “Peter Pan is a wish-fulfillment story about the triumph of youth over age which caught the mood of the new young century” (Wullschlager 126). It is a child’s fantasy of war where the evil Captain Hook and his pirates are defeated by Peter Pan and the Lost Boys.

Peter Pan was based on a novel written by Sir James Matthew Barrie called *The Little White Bird*; Barrie liked the character Peter so much that he developed him into the play *Peter Pan*. Unexpectedly, *Peter Pan* or *The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* was a tremendous success when it first premiered in 1904. “Peter Pan has broken into the fourth dimension of imagination” (Bruce K. Hanson, *The Peter Pan Chronicles* [New York: Birch Lane Press, 1993], 9). Barrie is one of the writers from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century who transformed children’s literature with their stories of childhood fantasy. He has been grouped with Lewis Carroll, who wrote *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*; Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*; and A. A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*. Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* and Barrie’s *Peter Pan* were both about the hedonistic lives of little boys. Barrie and the other writers developed their work by telling fantasy stories about children, to the children who were closest to them.

The Darling family in *Peter Pan* is based on a friend of Barrie’s, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, and her family. Barrie not only invented Peter Pan by making up stories for the Davies children, but he also named the boys in *Peter Pan* after them. Also, the name Wendy was invented by a little girl named Margaret who called Barrie what sounded like Wendy, but in reality was “my friendly.” Barrie became friends with the Davies children and would play with them in Kensington Park; he never had children of his own, so he tried desperately to join the Davies family. “Now Barrie could be part of a whole family, a surrogate father to the boys and confidant to Sylvia without any fear of intimacy. He knew she was very much in love with her husband” (Hanson 24). Barrie’s fear of growing up kept him from wanting a complete relationship with a woman. “He . . . could still barely talk to a girl without twisting his tongue into knots. He always described himself as a ‘man’s man,’ and his happiest pleasures continued to be boyish” (Wullschlager 120). In 1912 Barrie hired Sir George Frampton to make a statue of Peter Pan. Barrie gave Frampton a photograph of Michael, who was Barrie’s favorite Davies boy, as a guide to make the statue. As a sample of Barrie’s boyish behavior, he put the statue out in the middle of the night because he wanted people to believe it was magic; the statue is still located in the Kensington Gardens in London where it was originally placed.

Indeed, Barrie was sometimes criticized as the man who would not grow up. In a biography of his mother, Margaret Ogilvy, Barrie said, “Nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much” (cited in Wullschlager 107). *Peter Pan* is considered, in some ways, a self-portrait of Barrie; he was a man who didn’t want to grow up. Since he was not able to stay a boy forever, he invented Peter Pan, who will be eternally young. It is believed by some that the death of his older brother, David, caused Barrie to wish he could remain a child forever. When Barrie was a child, his brother

David died in an accident, and, to console his mother, the young James tried to become just like David by wearing his clothes and mimicking his whistle. Barrie once said of his brother David: “When I became a man, he was still a boy of thirteen.’ But he, too, in a different way failed to grow up” (Wullschlager 119).

Women are often cast in the role of Peter Pan, and it may be because of Barrie’s love for children. He used to take the Davies children to English pantomimes: “For Christmas of 1901, Barrie treated the Davies boys to another pantomime, Bluebell in Fairyland. . . . The English pantomimes were presented as a holiday treat for children. They included songs, comedy, a harlequin clown, magic, flying and spectacular effects. . . . The principal boy was played by a woman rather than a male child as she would be able to handle the many lines and also appear convincingly as a young male” (Hanson 25–26). Seeing how amused the children were with the pantomime, Barrie thought he could certainly write one—and there has certainly never been another pantomime like Peter Pan.

The first actress to play Peter was Nina Boucicault in 1904; Pauline Chase played Peter from the 1906–07 season to the 1914–15 season. Barrie did not forget these early actresses; in fact, Pauline Chase was his favorite actress, and he used Chase and Boucicault as examples for the new actresses. Barrie told new actresses “that Peter should be a lovable tomboy, as . . . Pauline Chase portrayed him . . . or . . . he must be the whimsical, fairy creature that Nina Boucicault made him” (Hanson 31). Some people have objected to the pantomime tradition, and Peter Pan has been criticized because the leading male role often goes to a woman. Giles Gordan said, “Let us never see a gal as Peter again” (Hanson 239). After Sandy Duncan played Peter Pan, she said: “When I was doing it there was a lot of encouragement to be Sandy Duncan doing Peter Pan. I said if I’m going to do it I’d like to do it as much as possible like a boy” (Hanson 229). Another legacy from pantomimes is that there has always been music in Peter Pan even though Barrie did not write Peter Pan as a musical. The first musical version of Peter Pan starred Maude Adams in 1905, and other adaptations followed.

In the words of Bruce K. Hanson, “With the exception of Hamlet, no other role has been as coveted by so many actors as has Peter.” He also says, “There are at least three reasons why people of all ages enjoy Peter Pan--the play, the flying, and Peter Pan himself” (Hanson 17). J.M. Barrie created a masterpiece with Peter Pan, the magical, imaginary world of the Neverland, where people don’t grow old, where mythical creatures exist, and where in a world of good versus evil, good always triumphs.

Peter Pan: For Children—and Adults

By Lynnette L. Horner

From *Insights*, 2000

“You have the secret of making us grownup people feel like the children for whom you wrote *Peter Pan* or the *Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. . . . My advice to everyone who has children is to take them to the Duke of York's Theatre without delay. Those who have no children should immediately borrow some for the afternoon” (Bruce K. Hanson, *The Peter Pan Chronicles* [New York: Birch Lane Press, 1993], 49).

This critic's review from *The King* (January 14, 1904), heralded the early success of one of the theatre's most beloved plays. It also reinforces the message that, although written as a children's play, *Peter Pan* provides a vehicle for adults to time travel to the Neverland of their youth.

Peter Pan began not as a play or a book, but by the spontaneous combustion of imaginary adventures invented and played out by Sir James M. Barrie and a young family of boys who adopted him as a surrogate uncle. Barrie met the young Davies family while walking his St. Bernard in Kensington Park. He told the boys, Jack, George, Peter, and Michael, of a young boy who fell out of his pram as an infant and now lived in the park and was friends with fairies and animals. When *Peter Pan* evolved to become a play, Barrie explained to his young friends about the modeling of the hero of the play “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.”

Peter Pan first appeared in print in a book written by Barrie entitled *The Little White Bird*. Peter is a combination of classic characters and popular heroes of the day. Barrie's genius was taking the bits and pieces of what already existed in the public psyche and marketing *Peter Pan* as an existing legend. Barrie wrote in *The Little White Bird*: “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.’ . . . 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’” (Hanson, 10). *Peter Pan* was familiar because he contained so many elements of childhood fantasy that were universal whether you were a child in 1904 or 1994. Who hasn't experienced larger than life bullies, real or imaginary, and fantasized about vanquishing them with cocky assurance, as Peter does Captain Hook and his pirates? Who would not cheer the hero-child who is wise enough to know you can banish wolves by looking at them through your legs?

Peter Pan entered the theatre as a perennial Christmas pantomime. Though steeped in tradition, British pantomime may be new to many American audiences. Traditionally, the pantomime is based on familiar stories with stock characters woven loosely together with music, magic, clowns, and spectacular effects. A young actress typically portrays the young male hero. [Editor's Note: In the Utah Shakespeare Festival's production, *Peter Pan* is played by a male actor.]

Though *Peter Pan* began as a Christmas pantomime, it found its way through the years to London and Broadway stages, silent film, television, and movie adaptations. Barrie created an essence in *Peter Pan* that molds itself to the stamp of individual performers without losing its universal chord. Indeed, *Peter Pan* was often adapted to showcase an individual performer's unique abilities. Dozens of actresses have acted the role of Peter. In London, legends such as Elsa Lanchester, Glynis Johns, Hayley Mills, and Maggie Smith and, in America, Maude Adams, Eva Le Gallienne, Jean Arthur, Mary Martin, Sandy Duncan, Cathy Rigby, and Mia Farrow have given their distinctive interpretations. Reviews of the many actresses' performances ranged with adjectives like, “tomboy,” “fairy-like,” “athletic,” “boyish,” “ephemeral,” and “puckish.”

From its beginnings, although the essence of *Peter Pan* is the same, the play itself changed, evolved, and returned to the original, only to change again. In the original play, all the lost boys

return to their mothers and Wendy is shown returning to the treetops to do Peter's spring cleaning.

For the American premiere in 1906, a scene with Peter singing "Sally in Our Alley" and a new act entitled "Marooner's Rock or the Mermaid Lagoon" were added. The material highlighted the musical talents of Maude Adams, and gave Peter a touching moment as he faces destruction, to say, "It must be a great adventure to die." This act has been added and deleted from the play many times through the years.

In 1913-14, audiences began to question what happened to Wendy and Peter as Wendy grew older. A final scene was added at this time featuring a grown up Wendy with her hair piled on top of her head. We are introduced to Jane, Wendy's daughter who poignantly takes Wendy's place in Peter Pan's life.

Just as Maude Adams created a Peter Pan to highlight her talents, Jean Forbes-Robertson also added her touch to Peter Pan by introducing the lines, "You mustn't touch me. You must never touch me," as Wendy rushes to comfort a saddened Peter. She felt this line punctuated Peter's fairy-like status and alienation from the rest of us mere mortals.

In 1924, *Peter Pan* became a silent movie.

Eva Le Gallienne revolutionized Peter Pan in the 1930s with her Civic Repertory Theater production. She was the first to add a touch of athleticism to Peter Pan and spearheaded the development of a better flying system so she could soar out over the audience

In the 1950s, Peter Pan became a vehicle to showcase another major talent, Mary Martin. Thus, Peter Pan changed again and became a highly successful Broadway musical.

Peter Pan is nearing a century old now. The boy who wouldn't grow up has aged very well. Perhaps it's because even as adults, we still succumb to the invitation of Barrie: "If you shut your eyes and are a lucky one, you may see at times a shapeless pool of lovely pale colours suspended in the darkness; then if you squeeze your eyes tighter, the pool begins to take shape, and the colours become so vivid that with another squeeze they must go on fire. But just before they go on fire you see the lagoon. This is the closest you ever get to it on the mainland. Just one heavenly moment; if there could be two moments you might see the surf and hear the mermaids singing" (Peter Pan [New York: Signet Classics, 1987], 86).