J. M. BARRIE

PETER PAN IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

PETER AND WENDY

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens
Peter and Wendy

Edited with an Introduction by
PETER HOLLINDALE

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THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

PETER PAN IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

PETER AND WENDY

JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE was born at Kirriemuir in Angus, Scotland, in 1860. After attending Dumfries Academy and Edinburgh University, he joined the Nottingham Journal as leader writer in 1883. Two years later he went to London to seek a living as a freelance writer. Drawing on his mother's memories of her childhood years, he achieved early success with stories about his home town. The first such collection, *Auld Licht Idylls*, was published in 1888. His novel *The Little Minister* (1891) achieved great popularity, but from the 1890s onwards he turned most of his attention to the theatre. A succession of long-running plays, including *Quality Street* and *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), brought Barrie wealth and critical acclaim. His most famous creation, Peter Pan, first appeared in the novel *The Little White Bird* (1902), and the play *Peter Pan* was first staged in 1904. *Peter and Wendy* followed seven years later. Barrie continued to enjoy great public recognition and success, but his private life was clouded by divorce and a series of bereavements, and he wrote less in his later years. He died in London in 1937.

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INTRODUCTION

'ALL Barrie's life', wrote Roger Lancelyn Green, 'led up to the creation of Peter Pan, and everything that he had written so far contained hints or foreshadowings of what was to come.'[1]

Biographical interpretations of literature are less favoured than they used to be, but J. M. Barrie remains a continuing subject for this kind of exegesis. This is because there really is an exceptionally close and visible interaction between Barrie's life and his work. Barrie himself drew conscious attention to his practice of converting experience into art—not only privately, for his own uses, in his notebooks, but publicly and openly, in novels, autobiography, and speeches. Above all, the last stage in the gradual evolution of *Peter Pan*,[2] Barrie's relationship with the family of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, has in recent years become widely known as a strange and moving drama in its own right. Peter's beginnings, however, lay much earlier than that, in his creator's own childhood, and earlier still, in the childhood of his mother.

Tracing a story's origins is not the same thing as explaining it, and even Barrie—an unusually self-aware, self-conscious author—was writing in the *Peter Pan* stories something more than he at first knew. In any case, the biographical background does not form a single and cohesive pattern, and some of the psychological critiques which the books and play have attracted, Freudian and otherwise, are over-neat and unconvincing. It may be more helpful simply to point to certain events and occurrences in Barrie's life which clearly have a bearing on *Peter Pan*. How much significance we attach to one or another of them will be determined by (as much as it will determine) the way we read the books.

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[1] Roger Lancelyn Green, *J. M. Barrie* (Bodley Head, 1960), 34.

[2] In the following discussion, the term *Peter Pan* is used inclusively for the four major texts by Barrie in which Peter appears. The full titles of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy* are used for references to the individual texts, and particular references to Peter Pan in the theatre are indicated by 'the play *Peter Pan*'.

Barrie was born in 1860, at Kirriemuir near Forfar in Scotland, the son of a hand-loom weaver, David Barrie, and his wife, who in keeping with a Scottish custom had retained her maiden name of Margaret Ogilvy. There were six surviving older children, two brothers and four sisters. Both the brothers were academically gifted. By the time Barrie was 6, they were both set fair for distinguished academic or ecclesiastical careers. The eldest, Alexander, had taken first class honours at Aberdeen University and had founded a private school at Bothwell in Lanarkshire. Arrangements were made for the second son, David, to attend it: he was now 13, and quickly using up the academic stimulus that Kirriemuir could offer. Barrie's biographer, Janet Dunbar, has noted:

> Margaret Ogilvy had never been able to disguise the fact that David was the favourite of all her children. He was quiet, studious, and would undoubtedly have a brilliant and glorious future. She had become intensely ambitious for this boy. Her eldest born was a teacher ... but young David, she determined, was to be the minister that all mothers of sons hoped for.[3]

These aspirations ended crushingly in January 1867, when David was killed in a skating accident on the eve of his fourteenth birthday. Margaret Ogilvy was inconsolable, and never fully recovered. The full effects of this catastrophe on Barrie can still be only guessed at, despite his own elaborate and harrowing description of them in the memoir of his mother, *Margaret Ogilvy*, which he published many years later. What mattered most was that the boy David (and not for nothing is that phrase the title of Barrie's very last play) had been stopped in the tracks of time, perpetually 13, for the young Barrie to grow to and pass by: 'When I became a man,' he wrote in *Margaret Ogilvy*, '... he was still a boy of thirteen,'[4] and Andrew Birkin has succinctly expressed the significance of that:

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[3] Janet Dunbar, *J. M. Barrie: The Man Behind the Image* (Collins, 1970), 8.

> If Margaret Ogilvy drew a measure of comfort from the notion that David, in dying a boy, would remain a boy for ever, Barrie drew inspiration. It would be another thirty-three years before that inspiration emerged in the shape of Peter Pan, but here was the germ, rooted in his mind and soul from the age of six.[5]

There were other consequences, bearing the dreadful long-term rigour of obligations self-imposed in early childhood, which ensued from David's death and Margaret Ogilvy's distraught reaction to it.

> At first, they say, I was often jealous, stopping her fond memories with the cry, 'Do you mind nothing about me?' but that did not last; its place was taken by an intense desire ... to become so like him that even my mother should not see the difference ... Then I practised in secret.[6]

He describes the moment when he triumphantly imitated his dead brother's whistle and characteristic stance, and admits his belated realization of the hurt it must have caused. Subtle exercises in psychology are not needed here to see the beginnings of that complex feeling about mothers which shows itself in the *Peter Pan* stories and elsewhere in his work: the mixture of intense, sentimental devotion to motherhood, and distrustful resentment at its possible desertions. The sense of exclusion from a desired maternal relationship is fundamental to the *Peter Pan* stories, and Peter's seemingly wilful choice of everlasting childhood is bravado for deprived necessity. The books are scattered with examples of real or threatened breaches of contract between adult and child, and both sides are offenders. But Peter himself, and the author-in-Peter, are the only lasting victims. The emptiness, solitude, and jealousy at the heart of Peter have their likely origins in this childhood ordeal of perceived rejection.

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[4] Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy* (Uniform Edition, 1927), 15.

[5] Andrew Birkin, *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys* (Constable, 1979), 5.

[6] Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy*, p. 12.

Perhaps too it is possible to see in this first traumatic imitation (soon to be followed by more light-hearted theatrical ventures in the Kirriemuir wash-house) the beginnings not only of an interest in acting and theatre, but more ominously of the surrender to role-playing and make-believe, the inner vacuum of personality which makes for endless shape-shifting, because there is always another more real and believable than oneself. If we ask why Peter Pan is indeed the 'tragic boy', it is partly because he is exempted from a personal reality: he is free to play an enticing variety of roles, but in the end his freedom is the freedom to be nothing. If this is true, its beginnings may lie in the 6-year-old Barrie's efforts to be David.

As Barrie grew older his relationship with his mother grew closer and more intense, though never able to supplant the one that had been taken away. As Kirriemuir turned to the future, and the weavers' handlooms were replaced by factories, so Margaret Ogilvy's mind turned to the past, and the stories she told to the young Barrie made her childhood as vivid as his own:

> The reason my books deal with the past instead of with the life I myself have known is simply this, that I soon grow tired of writing tales unless I can see a little girl, of whom my mother has told me, wandering confidently through the

pages. Such a grip has her memory of her girlhood had upon me since I was a boy of six.[7]

Margaret Ogilvy recalled the games and pleasures of her childhood, but also the tasks and premature responsibilities that came her way when she was only 8. At this early age the death of her mother 'made her mistress of the house and mother to her little brother', and in Barrie's description of his mother's childhood self we can see a prototype for two of his most deeply-felt creations, first Grizel in *Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel*, and a few years later Wendy:

> . . . she carried the water from the pump, and had her washing-days and her ironings and a stocking always on the wire for odd moments, and gossiped like a matron with the other women, and humoured the men with a tolerant smile—all these things she did as a matter of course, leaping joyful from bed in the morning because there was so much to do . . . and then rushing out in a fit of childishness to play dumps or palaulays with others of her age.[8]

The figure of the 'little mother', which infiltrates so much of Barrie's work and has its most enduring expression in Wendy, can be found in origin here. Wendy's childhood life is a replica of Margaret Ogilvy's. The work of adult female drudgery is a game, in happy imitation of the grown-ups. A moment's relaxation for Wendy, as for Margaret Ogilvy, is usefully spent on a domestic task: 'there were whole weeks when, except perhaps with a stocking in the evening, she was never above ground.' For her the Neverland is a game come true; like Margaret Ogilvy with a younger brother, she has juvenile males who really need her to mother them, and both girls can try out the game of humouring the fallible adult male before they must confront the reality. For Wendy, as for Barrie's mother, a customary adult female role can be first experienced as play. There is a kind of loss in this quick growing, but one that can still be relieved by childhood games of a less mature and imitative kind. With space for these relapses, the female progression from childhood to adult life is an unbroken continuum: Wendy is already a miniature Mrs Darling, just as Margaret Ogilvy the child is recognizably the mother Barrie knew. Of all the children, Wendy's flight to the Neverland is much the shortest. In Barrie's imaginative vision, things are very different for the boys.

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[7] Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy*, p. 19.
[8] Ibid. 22.

For our understanding of the *Peter Pan* stories, perhaps the most important of all Barrie's own childhood recollections is the one that follows the account of his mother's:

> I see her frocks lengthening ... and the games given reluctantly up. The horror of my boyhood was that I knew a time would come when I also must give up the games, and how it was to be done I saw not (this agony still returns to me in dreams, when I catch myself playing marbles, and look on with cold displeasure); I felt that I must continue playing in secret, and I took this shadow to her, when she told me her own experience, which convinced us both that we were very like each other inside. She had discovered that work is the best fun after all, and I learned it in time, but have my lapses, and so had she.[9]

The evidence suggests that they were indeed 'very like each other inside'. Margaret Ogilvy as Barrie depicts her strongly resembles her son in her humour, her taste for literature and imaginative adventure and make-believe, her continuing playfulness and fondness for games, her cutting sense of the ridiculous. She resembles him too in more profound and circumstantial ways, not least the lasting vividness of childhood recall. They

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[9] Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy*, pp. 22–3.

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shared in practice the enforced need to grow up early, she in response to her mother's death, he in the precocious self-imposed responsibility for her which he assumed when David died. Like Barrie, she remained in many ways continuingly young, and yet in one part dead (she because of David's death, he because of David's and her own). Both of them appear to have felt a lasting need for an exceptionally close and equal companionship with children, and it could be argued that in trying to satisfy this need they committed innocent but harmful trespass on the lives of children—he in course of time on the Llewelyn Davies boys, and she on Barrie himself.

Whatever the causes, Barrie did indeed retain his addiction to games. Like David before him, he left Kirriemuir to go to school elsewhere, under the guardianship of his elder brother Alec. What he afterwards said were his happiest years were spent at Dumfries Academy between 1873 and 1878. Here, with the company of like-minded friends, he played out the imaginary adventures of pirates and redskins which later contributed so much to *Peter Pan*. He recalled them many years later in a speech in the town: 'our escapades in a certain Dumfries garden, which is enchanted land to me, were certainly the genesis of that nefarious work.'[10]

For girls, as Margaret Ogilvy's life and memories suggest, there was a possible continuum from childhood to maturity, and Wendy's favoured games are imitations of a life she can expect. Boyhood in Barrie is a different matter. The psychological strangeness of his childhood was accompanied in his case by certain physical oddities: he was slow to mature, and only in his late teens began to shave; he was very short, no more than five foot one, and for most of his life retained unusually boyish and youthful features; his hair remained black throughout his life, and Cynthia Asquith records in her memoir that in old age this distressed him, for fear that people might think he used dye. This extended boyishness was no disadvantage at Dumfries, but when he went on to Edinburgh University he became unhappily aware of being different from other men. For him there was no continuum from child to adult, nor yet the usual transition from conventional boys' make-believe to conventional male adult life, but rather perhaps a no man's land between the two. It was in Peter and Wendy that he polarized most successfully the ambiguities of his central vision—the child-in-adult and the adult-in-child. Peter and Wendy are perhaps the centre-piece of Barrie's imagination: opposite visions of the Neverchild. Wendy is the child playing adult roles and games, and in her the incipient adult and mother already control the child; Peter is the child playing adult roles also, but in him the child is inviolable, separate and free. For Peter being 'father' is fun only if he knows that it is not and will not be true. The children are playing games, and the stories about them are also a game, played out in the no man's land between child and adult worlds.

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[10] Quoted by Roger Lancelyn Green, *Fifty Years of 'Peter Pan'* (Peter Davies, 1954), 8.

Barrie's early life and experience, together with his physical make-up, therefore form a complex pattern of potential influences on his later work, and especially on *Peter Pan*. The factors are powerful and various, and do not lend themselves to the comprehensive, systematic diagnosis which has often been attempted. It is impossible to say what mattered most. But their presence in Barrie's later work is easy enough to detect, and not in *Peter Pan* alone. There is general agreement that Barrie was a man who could not fully grow up, and with characteristic authorial detachment (something akin to the 'cold displeasure' of his dream) he came to this conclusion for himself. Barrie habitually converted himself into literature, bringing to bear a dispassionate and ruthless judgement, and his most callous act of self-portraiture is Tommy Sandys, the youthful 'hero' of *Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel*. Tommy is a 'sentimentalist', in Barrie's particular meaning of the term—he is a human chameleon, able at will to shape-shift and inhabit other people's feelings. His own feelings, however, are hollow and flawed. Tommy is unable to love, unable to experience sexual feeling, unable to grow up. He manages to become a popular and successful author, while remaining helplessly immature. In Barrie's portrait of Tommy there is a strange mixture of yearning and detached, contemptuous judgement:

> Oh, who by striving could make himself a boy again as Tommy could! I tell you he was always irresistible then. What is genius? It is the power to be a boy again at will. When I think of him flinging off the years and whistling childhood back . . . when to recall him in those wild moods is to myself to grasp for a moment at the dear dead days that were so much the best . . . I see that all that was wrong with Tommy was that he could not always be a boy.[11]

One of the bitterest moments of this bitter novel occurs when Barrie endows Tommy's sentimental intelligence with knowledge of a truth which Tommy is utterly incapable of *experiencing* as knowledge: 'The only tragedy is not to have known love.' Like so much of Tommy Sandys, it is a truth which is highly relevant to Barrie's depiction of Peter. And indeed an early scenario for *Peter Pan* can be found laid out in *Tommy and Grizel*: it is the plot of the child-adult Tommy's last book, 'The Wandering Child':

> It is but a reverie about a little boy who was lost. His parents find him in a wood singing joyfully to himself because he thinks he can now be a boy for ever; and he fears that if they

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[11] Barrie, *Tommy and Grizel* (Cassell, 1900 edn.), 214.

> catch him they will compel him to grow into a man, so he runs farther from them into the wood and is running still, singing to himself because he is always to be a boy.[12]

Roger Lancelyn Green's is a highly sympathetic but essentially accurate judgement on *Tommy and Grizel*:

> Grizel and Tommy are to a great extent the angry shadows of tragedy cast before by the Wendy and Peter who were so soon to be, and the deeper afterthought of the tragic that lingers in the background of *Peter Pan* is the mist still hanging above their tears.[13]

Tommy and Grizel was completed in 1899. Two years earlier had come the chance event that turned half a lifetime's gradual preparing for the story of Peter Pan into precise occasion and specific form. Barrie, by now a rich and successful playwright, had made an unsatisfactory marriage to the actress Mary Ansell and was living in London, near Kensington Gardens. His habit was to walk in the Gardens every afternoon with his St Bernard dog, Porthos, and on one of these strolls in 1897 he made the acquaintance of two small boys, George Llewelyn Davies, aged 4, and his 3-year-old brother, Jack. At a New Year's Eve dinner at the end of 1897 he found himself by chance sitting next to their mother, Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, the daughter of George du Maurier. The long, strange, and painful story of Barrie's subsequent lifelong involvement with the Llewelyn Davies family has been unforgettably told by Andrew Birkin in his biographical study, *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys*. This book is indispensable reading for those who wish to understand the genesis of *Peter Pan*, but the essentials can be briefly described.

The little boys, particularly George, were captivated by Barrie. To George, as Birkin puts it:

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[12] Barrie, *Tommy and Grizel*, p. 399.

[13] *Fifty Years of 'Peter Pan'*, p. 12.

A CHRONOLOGY OF JAMES MATTHEW BARRIE

1860 Born 9 May, at Kirriemuir in Angus, Scotland, third son and seventh surviving child of David Barrie and Margaret Ogilvy.

1867 Brother David dies of fractured skull after skating accident, on eve of his fourteenth birthday.

1868 Attends Glasgow Academy, living with elder brother Alec, who teaches there.

1871 Attends Forfar Academy and lives at family home in Forfar, following brother's resignation and prospective appointment to HM Inspectorate.

1873 Attends Dumfries Academy, again living with brother Alec.

1877 First play, *Bandelero the Bandit*, performed by Dumfries Amateur Dramatic Club.

1878 Enters Edinburgh University.

1882 MA Edinburgh.

1883 Joins *Nottingham Journal* as leader writer.

1884 Dismissed by *Nottingham Journal* (Oct.) 'An Auld Licht Community' published by *St James's Gazette* (Nov.).

1885 Leaves Kirriemuir to seek living as freelance writer in London (Mar.)

1887 *Better Dead*. Founds his private cricket team, the Allahakbarries.

1888 *Auld Licht Idylls. When a Man's Single.*

1889 *A Window in Thrums.*

1890 *My Lady Nicotine.*

1891 *The Little Minister. Richard Savage* (written with H. B. Marriott Watson) first performed. *Ibsen's Ghost* first performed.

1892 *Walker, London* first performed, with Mary Ansell in a leading role. *The Professor's Love Story* first performed, in New York.

1894 Marries Mary Ansell. Moves into 133 Gloucester Road (near Kensington Gardens).

1895 6 Sept., death of Margaret Ogilvy.

1896 *Margaret Ogilvy*. *Sentimental Tommy*. Visits America for first time to meet Charles Frohman, eventual producer of *Peter Pan*.

1897 First meeting with the family of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, first with boys George and Jack in Kensington Gardens, later with Mrs Llewelyn Davies, daughter of novelist George du Maurier and sister of actor Gerald du Maurier. Subsequently becomes regular and frequent visitor at Davies' home, 31 Kensington Park Gardens. Dramatized version of *The Little Minister* first performed.

1900 *Tommy and Grizel*. *The Wedding Guest* first performed. Mary Barrie leases Black Lake Cottage, near Farnham, Surrey. Michael Llewelyn Davies born.

1901 *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island*.

1902 *The Little White Bird*. *Quality Street* first performed. *The Admirable Crichton* first performed. Barries move to Leinster Corner, near Kensington Gardens. Death of Barrie's father.

1903 *Little Mary* first performed.

1904 *Peter Pan* first performed (27 Dec.), at Duke of York's Theatre. Llewelyn Davies family moves to Egerton House, Berkhamstead.

1905 *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire* first performed.

1906 *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*.

1907 Death of Arthur Llewelyn Davies. Barrie involved in campaign for reform of theatre censorship, following Lord Chamberlain's refusal of licence to Harley Granville-Barker's *Waste*.

1908 Sole performance of *When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought* (22 Feb.).

1909 Barrie divorces Mary on grounds of her adultery with Gilbert Cannan. Moves to flat at 3 Adelphi Terrace House, overlooking Embankment. Refuses knighthood.

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