

Peter Pan- Critics and Quotes for Consideration

The Villains: Hook and Mr. Darling (Friedman/Kavey)

Barrie: "'No, no,' Mr. Darling always said, 'I am responsible for it all. I, George Darling, did it. *Mea culpa, mea culpa.*' He had had a classical education. 'Let them,' he answered recklessly. 'Bring in the whole world. But I refuse to allow that dog to lord it in my nursery for an hour longer.'"

Barrie: "He [Hook] was never more sinister than when he was most polite, which is probably the truest test of breeding; and the elegance of his diction, even when he was swearing, no less than the distinction of his demeanor, showed him one of a different cast from his crew."

Friedman: Hook is "an obsessed man psychologically tortured by competing systems of moral and immoral behavior and emotionally constricted by interlocking codes of honor and masculinity."

Kavey: In many play versions, the same actor plays Hook and Mr. Darling. "Suddenly, the banker and the pirate, though clad very differently, seem to have a lot in common, and those similarities serve as a commentary on the stringent boundaries placed on men by the cultural expectations of the early twentieth century."

How do we compare Mr. Darling with Hook? In what ways is Hook distinctly a villain, and how does he sometimes get away from this persona? How do you think this connection speaks to a greater theme in the play?

Neverland- Children, Power and Imagination

Barrie: "Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal. John's, for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting, while Michael, who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together. John had no friends, Michael had friends at night, Wendy had a pet wolf forsaken by its parents."

Barrie: "For after many moons they did reach it, and, what is more, they had been going pretty straight all the time, not perhaps so much owing to the guidance of Peter or Tink as because the island was looking for them. It is only thus that any one may sight those magic shores."

Look at some of the other passages describing Neverland. What do you make of the power of the island itself versus the power that the children give it, and how does that change your ideas of Neverland and childhood itself? Is Barrie giving the children the power in the story, or is he giving the power to island--- and what meaning can you derive from this? What kind of statement about childhood does this text make, and how does the study of children's literature play into this?

Childhood and Adulthood (Peter Hollindale)- ‘To Be Boy Eternal’

Barrie: “All children, except one, grow up. They soon know that they will grow up, and the way Wendy knew was this. One day when she was two years old she was playing in a garden, and she plucked another flower and ran with it to her mother. I suppose she must have looked rather delightful, for Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, "Oh, why can't you remain like this forever!" This was all that passed between them on the subject, but henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end.”

Hollindale: Calls Peter Pan the “iconic figure of the *puer aeternus*, the eternal boy.” Hollindale believes it is “a play about the boundaries between childhood and adulthood” that asks “Is there a clear line of demarcation between them, like a national frontier, with no chance of return once crossed? This is very much what Barrie thought, and what the play says. Peter is a ‘tragic boy’ because he believes exactly this (or willfully pretends to) and hence refuses maturity. But what the play enacts is different from what it technically says...[that] the line between childhood and adult life has certain crucial crossing-points...is fluid and shifting, and can be crossed and re-crossed in imagination, games and play.” He continues: “Children make experimental incursions into adult roles, secure in the possibility of retreat...On the other hand, adults are often nostalgic for a forfeited playfulness, so the play (which began with a mostly adult audience) provides a shared arena for children and grown-ups, playfully living forward and living back.”

Do you agree or disagree with Hollindale’s assessment? What evidence in the story explores this idea of the boundary between childhood and adulthood? Do you believe that the line between childhood and adult life is fixed and has clear boundaries, or fluid and shifting—and what insight about this does Peter Pan offer?

The History and Epistemology of Peter Pan (Kavey)

Kavey: “the fact based knowledge systems used by adults are too linear to chart the multidimensional fabric of Neverland... their variability and nonlinear motion.” She continues, “School, parents, and the surrounding culture begin to make their marks on the Neverlands as they increasingly intrude upon children’s lives, and children cope with these intrusions in different ways...incorporating bits of the real world into Neverland or creating another map for them”. Kavey writes of how “the narrator laments the loss of the Neverland as among the more painful experiences of growing up, and he points out that adults’ lack of access to it is made more painful by the realization that it still exists but has not place for them...”

Barrie: “We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more.” “Only Peter is left behind—trapped by his divided nature and his conflicting desires, but most of all by the children who need him and all of us who believe in him.”

Taking into consideration both the descriptions of Neverland’s physicality and the way the narrator describes how children and adults see/remember it, what do you think that Neverland represents? How might this contribute to the appeal of it as an idea that both children and adults respond to? Is this a story for children or adults, and how might nostalgia fit into this idea?

“Peter Pan and the First World War: The End of Innocence” (Hollindale, Robertson, etc)

“Peter Pan opened in December 1904, and returned in 1905 when it also opened for the first time in America...it continued to play annually throughout the First World War (and only failed to do so during the Second World War because theatres were closed by the London Blitz.”

‘To die will be an awfully big adventure’.

This line was omitted for the duration of the war, in deference to the many troops on leave who came to the play...the line was not Barrie’s. It was first spoken by the eldest of the Davies boys, George, in 1900, when he was six, and he and Barrie were inventing the earliest Peter Pan stories...In 1915 George Llewellyn Davies, the enchanting child-begetter of this famous line and later Barrie’s friend and support in the care of the younger boys, was killed in the trenches by a sniper.”

“Also in 1915, the liner Lusitania was torpedoed off Ireland, and quickly sank. On board was Charles Frohman, but for whose risk and insight Peter Pan might never been staged (he was the play’s first producer). Frohman refused a place in a lifeboat, and was reported to have said, ‘Why fear death? It is the greatest adventure in life.’”

Linda Robertson sees Peter Pan as captivating the “prewar popular consciousness in both Britain and America because he rebelled against the idea of becoming an adult with a professional career. He refused to be trapped in the straitjacket of civilized life. His rebellion against modernity, urbanity, and domesticity reflected a dominant strain in both American and British cultural criticism...With the onset of World War I, that ideal of remaining eternally youthful—of never having to take on the emasculating drudgeries of adulthood or the physical insults of old age—was transmogrified into the image of the youthful soldier off on the Great Adventure”

She continues by consider how a “gentle fantasy of the little boy who refused to grow up now becomes praise for young men who will not live past twenty. A fairy tale about being able to fly by thinking happy thoughts and laughing under a sprinkling of fairy dust becomes the military reality of learning to fly a plane fueled by gasoline into the skies, and if fate calls for it, going down in flames. And above all, it underscores to undertake The Great Adventure as the very foundation upon which Civilization must rest.”

Given this historical context and some of the ways *Peter Pan* was taken up during World War I, how does this change your perceptions as the story as meant for children or adults and also speaking to the binary between childhood and adulthood. In what ways does it seem appropriate, yet also problematic for the story to be taken up in these ways during the War, and what other evidence from the text might have encouraged such a usage? Can you think of any other examples of children’s books being used in similar ways? How does this change your ideas about the role of children’s literature in society?