Peter Pan Study Guide

Peter Pan by J. M. Barrie

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Introduction

Peter Pan, which was alternately titled "The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up," was first performed in London, England, on December 27, 1904, at the Duke of York Theatre. It has since become one of the most widely performed and adapted children's stories in the world. It is also Barrie's best-known work, though he was a prolific author writing in a number of genres. Critics believe that one reason *Peter Pan* was successful from the first is that Barrie combined fantasy and adventure in a way not done before. The play offers a fresh means of storytelling that appeals to both adults and children. While children enjoy the imaginative story and flights of fancy, adults can relate to Peter Pan's desire to forego mature responsibilities and live in the moment. Roger Lancelyn Green wrote in his book *Fifty Years of Peter Pan: "Peter Pan* is the only children' s play that is also a great work of literature."

The text of the play has evolved since it was first performed in 1904. The original stage production of *Peter Pan* was only three acts. Barrie let the story grow through several novels and different versions of the stage play to arrive at a standardized text by 1928. The playwright claimed that he did not remember writing the play, which began as a backyard amusement for some of his young friends. After its London debut, *Peter Pan* became an annual Christmas event in that city's theater district for several decades. The play has also been adapted into a musical stage version as well as several different kinds of movies. Ironically, considering the play's prominent theme of motherhood, Peter Pan is traditionally played by a young woman, while Nana the dog is usually played by a man in a dog suit.

Author Biography

J. M. Barrie was born on May 9, 1860, in Kirriemuir, Scotland, a village located in the Lowlands. He was the son of a poor weaver, David, and his wife, Margaret Ogilvy Barrie. Barrie was the second youngest of ten children and one of only several to survive infancy. Barrie's mother ensured that he received an education, and the playwright eventually received his M.A. from Edinburgh University in 1882. After Barrie's elder brother and Margaret Barrie's favorite son died when Barrie was six, he took it upon himself to take his brother's place. The author's relationship with his mother was unusually close and was often based in a fantasy world due to Margaret's bedridden condition. Barrie's complex relationship with his mother is thought by many to be the inspiration for the mother-worship that critics feel is central to *Peter Pan.*

Barrie began his writing career as a journalist soon after graduation from Edinburgh, first in Nottingham, then back in Scotland, and finally, London. In the late-1880s, Barrie published several novels and short stories. His first bestseller was 1891's *The Little Minister.* In that same year Barrie began writing plays and playlets, beginning with a one-act burlesque entitled *Ibsen's Ghost, or, Toole up to Date.* After successfully turning *The Little Minister* into a play in 1897, Barrie focused almost exclusively on the theatre. From 1901 until 1920, he wrote one play per year. One of Barrie's most famous plays during this period was 1902's *The Admirable Crichton,* a combination of fantasy and social commentary. These same elements were employed in Barrie's best-known work□and his only play intended explicitly for a young audience□*Peter Pan,* first produced in 1904.

The play had its roots in a novel Barrie published in 1902, *Little White Bird,* written for some young friends of Barrie, the Davies. Barrie met the family in London's Kensington Gardens in 1897 and was immediately enamored with the three young boys, George, Jack, and Peter, as well as their mother, Sylvia. Barrie befriended the family, spending considerable time with them over the years (the head of the Davies household, Arthur Davies, did not always like the situation but tolerated it nonethless). Barrie worshiped Sylvia much like he did his own mother. This relationship was developed to the exclusion of Barrie's wife, the actress Mary Ansell, whom he had married in 1894. They divorced in 1909, their marriage apparently unconsummated. In many ways, Barrie was like Peter Pan, a man who had not fully matured.

After *Peter Pan* and several novelizations of the story, Barrie continued writing notable plays. Most were adult dramas and comedies that frequently played with fantasy, including *Dear Brutus* (1917). Barrie's success as a playwright allowed him to be generous with funds, and he gave often to individuals as well as important causes. Barrie ceased to write plays until a year before his death when he suddenly produced two Biblical dramas. Barrie died on June 19, 1937, in London.

Plot Summary

Act I

Peter Pan opens in the nursery of the Darling family household in Bloomsbury, London. The family is somewhat impoverished, employing Nana, a Newfoundland dog, as the three children's nurse. When the play's action begins, Nana is putting the youngest Darling child, Michael, to bed, while Mrs. Darling prepares to go out for dinner with her husband. Wendy and John, the eldest and middle, respectively, play at being their parents for her. While Nana sees to the children. Mrs. Darling confides to her husband that she saw the face of a little boy at the window trying to get in and that she has seen it before. She almost caught him once but only managed to snare his shadow, which she has kept rolled up in a drawer. Mrs. Darling also describes a ball of light accompanying him.

Mr. Darling declares that he is sick of Nana working in the nursery and takes her to be tied up in the yard. Wendy hears Nana's barking, noting that the sound is one of danger and warning, not unhappiness. Despite her reservations about leaving her brood, Mrs. Darling tucks the children in bed and departs, turning out their light as she goes.

Right after she leaves, Tinkerbell and Peter Pan enter, looking for Peter's shadow. Peter finds the shadow but cannot reattach it. His efforts awaken Wendy. She learns that he does not have a mother and that she must never touch him. She finally realizes that he cannot reattach his shadow, and she sews it back on for him. She tries to kiss him, but he is ignorant of this simple display of affection. Instead, he gives Wendy an acorn button which she puts around her neck. He tells her about fairies and the Lost Boys and introduces her to Tinkerbell.

Peter reveals that none of the Lost Boys have mothers, so he comes to the Darling children's window to hear their stories and relate them to his friends. Wendy says that she knows lots of stories, so Peter teaches her how to fly so she can come to Never Land and tell stories to the Lost Boys. She insists that her brothers learn to fly as well, though Peter is not as interested in teaching them. Peter blows fairy dust on them and the children fly away to Never Land. Mr. and Mrs. Darling come home to find their children's beds empty.

Act II

In Never Land, the Lost Boys wait for Peter to return. They discuss their fear of pirates and how they do not remember their mothers. The pirates approach, lead by Captain Hook, and the boys hide in the trees. Captain Hook orders his crew to look for the boys, especially their leader, Peter Pan, because he cut Hook's arm off and the Captain wants revenge. Hook decides to catch the boys by leaving poisoned cake out that will kill

them. Tiger Lily and her band of Indians make a brief appearance, and they see the pirates. They decide that they will scalp them when they catch them.

Following the pirates' departure and Peter and the Darling children's arrival, the Lost Boys emerge from their hiding places. Tinkerbell tricks the boys into shooting an arrow at Wendy. Wendy falls to the ground and seems dead. Peter lands. Wendy is very much alive: the arrow hit the acorn button Peter gave her. Tinkerbell is unhappy to learn that Wendy is alive, and Peter sends her away.

Peter decides that they will build a house around the still-prostrate Wendy. While Peter and the Lost Boys gather material, Michael and John land. They cannot believe where they are, and Peter shortly employs them in the building of their house. Once the structure is built around her, Wendy wakes up. Everyone begs her to be their mother. After a moment of hesitation, she agrees and begins to tell them the story of Cinderella.

Act III

Peter and the boys play in the Mermaid's Lagoon, trying unsuccessfully to catch a mermaid to show Wendy. Peter tells Wendy about Marooners' Rock, where sailors are left to die by drowning in the tide. The boys sense danger, and they all hide underwater. Two of Hook's pirates show up with a captive Tiger Lily and her Indians. They leave their captives on the rock. Peter imitates Captain Hook's voice and tells the pirates to untie their prisoners. The pirates follow his orders and release Tiger Lily, but then the real Captain Hook arrives.

Hook tells his pirates that the boys have found a mother and that all is lost. One of Hook's men suggests that they capture Wendy and all the boys, kill the boys, then make Wendy their mother. Hook learns of the voice, Peter's, that commanded them to free Tiger Lily and communicates with it. Peter tells Hook that he is Hook. The real Hook asks many questions, but cannot figure the situation out. Finally, Peter tells Hook who he is, and leads an attack on the pirates. All the boys, except Peter, manage to capture the pirates dinghy and float away. Wendy and Peter are left stuck on the rock. The tide starts to come in, and Wendy makes her escape by holding on to the tail of a kite. Peter stays behind, hiding in a floating bird's nest.

Act IV

All of the children manage to make it back to their underground home. Tiger Lily and her Indians guard the children from the pirates above ground. Wendy has done the laundry and is serving the boys, save Peter, a pretend meal, as is done in New Land. The boys bicker among themselves, and it is revealed that Wendy regards Peter as the father of the bunch.

Peter returns and greets the Indians, thanking them for guarding his home. While the boys get ready for bed, Peter is concerned that it is only "pretend" that he is the father. When Wendy questions him, he tells her that he feels like her son, not the father to her

mother. The boys return and under Wendy's orders, climb into bed. The story she tells them is about her own home - her father, mother, and Nana - and her brothers immediately recognize it. Wendy ends the story by saying that she knows the mother is leaving the window open for the children, hoping they will return and fly through it. But when she implies that she and her brothers will eventually return, Peter is unhappy. Despite this, Wendy decides that they will return to their parents. She asks Peter to make the appropriate arrangements.

Tinkerbell is to guide the Darlings home, but she tries to refuse the task. The boys beg Wendy not to leave, but she quiets them by telling them to come back with her. Her parents, she is sure, will adopt the Lost Boys. Peter refuses to join them, though Wendy wants him to come along as well. As Tinkerbell leads them away, the Pirates attack the Indians, many of whom perish. Hook's crew takes Tiger Lily and several others prisoners. Hook has other pirates wait, and when Peter is deceived into believing the attack is over, everyone leaves. Captain Hook is right there and everyone, except Peter who is asleep, has been captured. Tinkerbell wakes Peter and tells him what has happened. Peter vows to rescue Wendy.

Act V, scene 1

On the pirate ship, Hook is happy, convinced that Peter is dead from the poison he left. Hook calls up the prisoners, telling them that six will walk the plank but two can become his cabin-boys. The boys refuse to work for him, and Wendy is brought up to witness their deaths.

Unbeknownst to Hook, Peter is swimming the waters around the ship, pretending to be a crocodile (the animal Hook most fears). Tinkerbell's light flits around, distracting the pirates, while Peter climbs aboard and hides in the cabin. Hook orders one of his men to fetch the cat, but the pirate does not return for he is killed in the cabin. Hook sends several other men inside, and they are all killed. This scares the pirates and they believe they are doomed. The boys are driven into the cabin, Peter releases their manacles, and they find hiding places from which to attack.

Hook decides to throw Wendy overboard to change their luck. Peter reveals himself then, and the boys attack. The battle finally comes down to Peter and Hook in a sword fight. When that reaches a stalemate, Hook arranges for the ship to be blown up in two minutes. Peter finds the bomb in time. Hook is finally defeated and eaten by a crocodile.

Act V, scene 2

In the Darling household nursery, Mrs. Darling waits for her children's return. Mr. Darling and Nana have switched places for his earlier actions which led to the loss of their children. Peter precedes the children and convinces Tinkerbell to bar the window to the nursery shut so the children will think they are unwanted. When he hears Mrs. Darling's sorrow, he opens the window again, and the children return. Michael and John are

momentarily disoriented but decide to creep into bed. The family reunites, then brings the rest of the Lost Boys into the house.

Peter calls Wendy, and Mrs. Darling offers to adopt him, too, but he refuses. Mrs. Darling offers that Wendy can visit Peter once a year for spring cleaning.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

This version of the classic fairy tale dramatizes the story of the boy who never wanted to grow up, Peter Pan, for the stage. Themes relating to the virtues of motherhood and freedom, as well as the transcendent nature of love, are explored within a fantastically imaginative context including fairies with attitude, flying children, dogs running a nursery, pirates, Indians and a ticking Crocodile.

The first act is titled *The Nursery*. As the clock in the Darling family nursery strikes six, Nana (a sheepdog who acts as the family nanny) prepares the three beds for their occupants and then fetches the youngest Darling child, Michael. He protests that it's not time for bed, but Nana takes him to be bathed anyway.

Mrs. Darling comes in and is startled to see a small face looking in at the window. She rushes to look out, finds no one there and checks to make sure her children are all right. Michael, she finds, is safe in his bath, and then when she calls for the other two children, Wendy and John, they come in from another room. As Mrs. Darling watches with relieved delight, they demonstrate the game they've been playing, "being you and father." As part of that game, they each announce to the other that they've just had another baby. An argument almost breaks out when Wendy expresses hope that it's a girl and John expresses real joy when he's told it's a boy. Michael comes out of the bathroom wanting to join in the game. John says they don't want any more children. When Michael seems upset, Mrs. Darling comforts him by saying she wants him.

Mr. Darling rushes in, angry that he can't tie his tie properly and demanding that Mrs. Darling tie it for him. He dramatizes the situation by saying that if the tie isn't tied, they can't go to dinner, and if they can't go to dinner, he can't go to work. If he can't go to work, the family will starve. The children are worried, but Mrs. Darling successfully ties the tie, and everyone relaxes. Nana, meanwhile, comes in to get John for his bath. He at first refuses, but Mr. Darling commands that he go. John goes out. As Mr. and Mrs. Darling reflect on how happy they are with their children, Nana accidentally brushes Mr. Darling's trousers and gets hair all over them. Mr. Darling is about to lose his temper, but Mrs. Darling again calms him. Nana goes out. Mr. Darling expresses concern about having a dog for a nanny, but Mrs. Darling insists that Nana stay, telling him about the face she saw at the window, which she describes as belonging to a little boy, and adding that the children need Nana for protection. She says that one night she caught the boy in the nursery, and as he flew away, she caught his shadow in the window as she closed it. She shows the shadow, which she keeps in one of the children's drawers, to Mr. Darling, saying she believes the boy keeps coming back to look for it. She goes on to say the boy wasn't alone. He was accompanied by a little ball of bouncing light. She asks Mr. Darling what it could all mean, and he has no idea.

Nana comes in with medicine for the children to take. When Michael and John refuse, Mr. Darling tells them the medicine he has to take is much worse. Wendy runs to fetch it and suggests that Mr. Darling take his as an example for the boys. At first Mr. Darling refuses, and with a childishness equal to Michael's, he argues about who is the bigger coward. Wendy gets Mr. Darling and Michael to agree to take their medicine at the same time, but just as they're about to swallow, Mr. Darling pulls his spoon away. Michael howls with protest. Mr. Darling tries to lighten the mood by putting his medicine in Nana's bowl, saying it will be a big joke on her. The Darlings all watch as Nana refuses to drink from her bowl and then retreats to her kennel, offended. Wendy comforts her. Mr. Darling cries out that nobody comforts him and huffily drags Nana out of the nursery to be tied up in the yard where he thinks she belongs. Mrs. Darling tries to comfort the upset children, who hear Nana barking loudly. John says she's unhappy, but Wendy says her bark is her danger bark, not her unhappy bark. Mrs. Darling looks worriedly out the window but sees nothing. Still uneasy, she tucks her children into bed, reassuring them (and perhaps herself as well) that once the nightlights are lit nothing can harm them. She then goes out to dinner.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

The fairy tale nature of this story is established right away with the appearance of Nana, the dog that thinks and acts like a determined, fussy human nanny. From then on, elements like the face at the window, the captured shadow and the ball of bouncing light all serve both as concrete indications of the kind of story being told and also as foreshadowing of the exciting, magical things to come.

Like all good fairy tales, the magic of *Peter Pan* is grounded in very human needs, emotions and relationships. The children's bickering, the debate over the relative worth of boys and girls, Mr. Darling's anxiety about being a success at business and about being able to provide for his family, Nana's protectiveness - all are recognizable as universal, almost archetypal human struggles with which everyone can identify. This gives the play's emotional journey its accessibility and ultimate ring of human truth. In these terms, the story's most important element is Mrs. Darling's concern for her children. This particular aspect of motherhood, along with explorations of motherhood in general, forms the thematic backbone of *Peter Pan*. The play is, in fact, a celebration of motherhood, of the love at its core and of the faith that that love is unchanging and eternal.

A noteworthy technical element throughout this play is the detailed stage directions. They come across as not only very specific, but also as though they're written in the voice of a storyteller, explaining words and actions and feelings in great detail as the narrative unfolds. This is quite different from many other plays, in which the details of what's going on emotionally and thematically emerge from the dialogue and the action. The point must be made here that in performance of this play, much of the material in these stage directions can't actually be interpolated into the action. They may flavor the interpretations of the actors and director, but for the most part, they are included for the benefit and illumination of a reader of the play, not a member of the audience.

One other important piece of foreshadowing includes the confrontation over the medicine, which is probably more of an all-purpose tonic rather than a treatment for a particular illness. Its appearance here foreshadows the important role medicine plays in the climax of Act 4.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

In the stillness after Mrs. Darling's exit, the window flies open, and a ball of light, the fairy Tinker Bell, flies in and bounces about. A moment later, Peter Pan flies into the room, looking for Tinker Bell (Tink) and asking if she knows where the shadow is. She shows him the drawer from which Mrs. Darling took the shadow earlier. Peter takes the shadow out, and then when Wendy stirs in her sleep, he quickly shuts the drawer with Tink inside it. He tries to attach his shadow to his feet, but he can't do it and starts to cry. Wendy wakes up and asks why he's crying. They introduce themselves, and then in answer to a question from Wendy, Peter says he lives "second to the right and then straight on till morning!" When conversation reveals that Peter doesn't have a mother, Wendy tries to comfort him with a hug, but he backs away from her, saying he must never be touched. Conversation turns to the shadow, and Wendy offers to sew it on for him. Peter accepts, and Wendy sews. Then when the shadow is sewn on, Peter flies about the room happily, shouting about how clever he is. Wendy takes offense, but Peter assures her that girls are worth much more than boys. Wendy gratefully offers him a kiss, and Peter holds out a hand to take it. Wendy is too kind-hearted to embarrass him by telling him he made a mistake, and so she gives him her thimble instead. In return, Peter gives his version of a kiss - a button, which Wendy puts on a chain around her neck.

Wendy asks Peter how old he is. Peter says he doesn't know, but he adds that he's been young a long time. The day he was born, he heard his parents talking about the kind of man he was going to be, and as a result, he ran away to be with the fairies. When Wendy expresses her excitement that he actually knows fairies, Peter tells her that a fairy is born every time a child is born, but then a fairy dies every time a child says he doesn't believe in fairies. This, he says, is why there aren't many fairies left. He then remembers Tink and starts looking for her. Wendy exclaims happily when Peter lets Tink out of the drawer and the fairy flies about the room. Tink shouts angrily in the bell-like fairy language, and Peter says she's saying nasty things about Wendy.

Ignoring the angry Tinker Bell, Wendy asks Peter where he lives. He explains that he lives with the Lost Boys, little boys who fell out of their carriages and were sent far away to Neverland. He says he's the leader, but he adds that he and all the boys are lonely. They have no female companionship because, he says, girls are too clever to fall out of their carriages. He appears to be attempting to flatter Wendy into coming to Neverland with him, and it seems to be working. Wendy gives Peter permission to give her a kiss. Peter thinks she wants the "kiss" she gave him earlier back (that is, the thimble). Wendy, however, says he can keep it and puckers her lips to give him what she calls a "thimble." Tink, however, prevents Wendy from "thimble-ing" Peter by pulling her hair. Peter scolds her, and Tink withdraws. Wendy asks Peter why he kept coming to the window. He explains that he came to hear the stories Mrs. Darling told Wendy and her brothers at night. Neither he nor the Lost Boys know any stories, and their favorite of the

stories he heard is Cinderella. He's desperate to know the ending. When Wendy tells him, Peter prepares to fly back to Neverland and tell the Lost Boys. To get him to stay, Wendy tells him that she knows lots of stories. Peter offers to teach her to fly so she can come to Neverland and tell them to the Lost Boys. Wendy asks him to teach John and Michael as well, and Peter agrees. Wendy wakes up her brothers and tells them the plan, and they react with excitement.

Just as Wendy, John and Michael are about to begin their flying lesson, however, Nana barks her danger bark again. This time, she's not outside. She's in the next room, and she's coming closer. The children hide behind the curtains, and a stage direction refers to how "strange things [are being] done to them; but it is not for us to reveal a mysterious secret of the stage." A maid brings Nana in, angrily tells her that everything's all right and takes her out again. The children emerge from their hiding places. Peter gives them a flying lesson, but none of them quite manage it. Then Peter remembers that he has to sprinkle them with fairy dust. He brushes some off his clothes and sprinkles the others with it. They fly happily about the room, and then Peter leads them off to Neverland.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

The fairy tale nature of the story is further defined in this section, with the appearance of Peter, the magical re-attachment of his shadow, the story of the Lost Boys and the teaching of Wendy, John and Michael to fly. The most important fairy tale element, however, is Peter's story of how fairies die, which foreshadows the play's emotional climax at the end of Act 4, in which Tink is saved from death. One other important piece of foreshadowing is Peter giving Wendy a button instead of a kiss. This foreshadows the way the button saves Wendy's life in Act 2.

The ongoing debate, for lack of a better term, over the relative merits of boys versus girls is, in fact, a variation on the play's core theme relating to the virtues of mothers and motherhood. As Wendy, who is after all a little girl, takes on more and more of a mothering role, it becomes possible to see that the play, on some level, is saying that girls are essentially mothers-in-training. This idea is reinforced by the way Peter and the Lost Boys eagerly embrace her as their mother and the way Peter continually praises the value of girls. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a traditional, conservative, almost repressive or sexist point of view. On the other hand, it must be remembered that what the play considers important about motherhood is not so much the fact that it's a woman doing it but that the children are taken care of and loved. At the time the play was written, and indeed for decades afterwards and centuries before, women were indeed the chief source of care and love in the family. By the end of the play, when even the uptight Mr. Darling is seen playing with his children and offering the newly adopted Lost Boys a happy home, it becomes clear that at the core of *Peter Pan's* celebration of motherhood is, in fact, a celebration of love.

The stage direction quoted in the last paragraph of the summary of this section is an example of the kind of stage direction that appears throughout the play. Rather than

being written in the mostly clinical, spare style of most stage directions in most plays, the stage directions here seem to be written with a smile and a wink, with an eye towards the child reading as opposed to the child watching. The "strange things" referred to here are, of course, the attachment of the wires necessary to create the stage illusion that Peter and the children are flying. Even when the wires are visible and everyone in the audience knows, on some level, that moments like this one exist to make the flying possible, on a more childlike and wonderful level, everyone wants to, and is prepared to, believe in Peter's magic. The audience wants to believe people can fly. Since flying throughout the play is an extended metaphor for emotional, physical and spiritual liberty, the real meaning of the audience's desire to believe can be seen as the ultimate, universal human desire to be free and to believe that such freedom is possible.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

The second act is titled *The Neverland*. A long and detailed stage direction describes the forest in Neverland where Peter makes his home. The seven Lost Boys appear, and each is described in detail. As they wait for Peter to return, they argue which of them is braver, comment on how anxious they are to hear what happened to Cinderella and debate which of them has better memories of his mother. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the pirates. After the boys all scurry into hiding, the pirates come on looking for them. They, like the Lost Boys, are described in detailed stage directions. The lengthiest description is of Captain Hook, the pirate leader. He is over-dressed, with over-styled hair and over-polite manners, and he has a hook where his right hand used to be.

One of the pirates spots one of the boys and is about to fire his pistol at him, but Hook stops him, saying that if they make too much noise, Tiger Lily's "redskins" will attack. He tells the pirates to scatter through the forest and look for all the boys, explaining to Smee, his first mate, that he wants to capture every one of them, and particularly Peter. Peter was the one who cut off his right hand and fed it to a Crocodile, who liked the taste so much he's been pursuing Hook ever since in the hopes of eating the rest of him. The Crocodile also swallowed a clock, the ticking of which always alerts Hook to the Crocodile's presence. Smee warns Hook that one day the clock will wind down and fall silent, and then Hook will be unable to hear the Crocodile coming. Hook confesses that that's his greatest fear. Suddenly he realizes that the giant mushroom he's sitting on is in fact a chimney, letting out the smoke from the fire in the Lost Boys' underground home. He quickly attempts to come up with a plan to catch them, but he stops suddenly when he hears the tick-tick-tick of the approaching Crocodile. They run off in terror, followed by the Crocodile.

In the silence that lingers in the wake of the Crocodile's passing, the Indian princess Tiger Lily and her braves appear. Very brief dialogue reveals they're tracking the pirates and are planning to scalp them. They go out in the same direction as the pirates.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

This first section defines the life awaiting Peter, Wendy, John and Michael when they arrive on Neverland. The arguments and loneliness of the Lost Boys are particularly noteworthy here, since they play a key role in defining the more thematically relevant action of the remainder of the play - the eventual adoption of Wendy as their mother.

Groundwork for the play's less thematically significant action, a sequence of escalating confrontations between the pirates and the Lost Boys, is also put into place here. Captain Hook, the play's chief antagonist, is introduced. His dislike for all children is

downplayed at this point, but it comes to the fore later after he kidnaps the Lost Boys in Act 4. He does this for the same reason he plots to catch them in this scene - as a means of gaining control over Peter. He's desperate to get revenge against Peter for his feeding Hook's hand to the Crocodile. In his obsessive desire to control Peter, and by extension the other boys, Hook can be seen as a symbolic embodiment of adulthood, of everything serious that Peter refuses so vehemently to be part of. Meanwhile, his story of the Crocodile and the Crocodile's appearance can be seen as foreshadowing both Hook's increasing fear of the Crocodile and his eventual, suicidal leap into its jaws.

The portrayal of Tiger Lily and the other Indians, variously referred to in the text as "redskins" and members of the "Pickanninny" tribe, are the unfortunate product of the time, the country (Great Britain) and the society in which the play was written. Indians in those circumstances were perceived and treated as savages, noble at times but essentially violent and uncivilized. The dialogue of the Indians here is written in what is called "pidgin English," a style that can best be described as using few words, incomplete sentences and incorrect meanings. It's possible that contemporary productions of *Peter Pan* struggle with this portrayal. However, if the Indians are treated in an exaggerated "fairy tale" style, as the imaginings of children playing "Cowboys and Indians," their lack of civilization, like the pirates' bloodthirstiness, can be seen as being unrealistic and perhaps less evocative of a racist perspective.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

After the Indians are gone, the Lost Boys re-emerge from their hiding places, speaking of how nervous they are without Peter. One of the boys describes a strange sight - a large white bird flying over the lagoon, heading in their direction and quietly moaning "Poor Wendy" to itself. One of the boys recalls that there are birds called Wendies. Another sees the Wendy bird coming, and a third spots Tink, chasing the Wendy. Tink calls down for the boys to shoot the Wendy, and one of them does. Wendy falls to the ground, and the boys realize she's a lady that Peter was bringing to them to take care of them. The boy that shot her prepares guiltily to leave the island forever, saying he's too afraid of Peter to stay. At that moment, Peter himself appears, wondering why they're not cheering him for bringing them a mother. They regretfully show him Wendy's body. Peter pulls the arrow from her chest and prepares to plunge it into the heart of the boy who shot her, but Wendy, still unconscious, reaches up and blocks him. Peter realizes that the arrow struck the button kiss he gave her in Act 2, Part 2. He also realizes she's all right and tells her to hurry up and get better so he can take her to see the mermaids. The boys inform Peter that Tink told them to shoot Wendy. Peter tells Tink he never wants to see her again, but when he sees how sad she is, he says she can come back in a week. Tink goes off in a huff.

Peter and the boys argue over what to do with Wendy, finally deciding to build a small house around her to protect her. As they run out to get materials, John and Michael arrive, both very tired and hungry. Peter, now focused entirely on the house, casually orders them to help build it. John reacts with disbelief, saying that Wendy's "only a girl." The implication is that she doesn't deserve a house. Peter and the boys proclaim themselves to be Wendy's servants, and one of them joins with Peter as they play at being doctors taking care of her. Wendy becomes conscious enough that she's able to sing a brief song describing the kind of house she wants. Peter and the boys finish the house and wait anxiously for Wendy to emerge from it, since they built the house around her. Wendy comes out and expresses her pleasure at the house. Peter and the Lost Boys beg her to be their mother. For a while Wendy, who clearly wants the job, protests that she doesn't have enough experience. She lets herself be convinced and immediately starts issuing firm orders, promising that if they obey she'll tell them the story of Cinderella. They rush into the little house, which stage directions say is "remarkable [because] it holds them." Peter stands guard with his sword drawn.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

Aside from the newly introduced fairy tale elements (Wendy's miraculous survival of the arrow, the house with the small exterior and large interior and the speed with which the house is built), there are two particularly noteworthy elements of this scene. The first is Peter's impulse towards violence and revenge, which functions on two levels. The first is

to reinforce the idea that he is a creature of impulse, as opposed to rational thought and consideration. Some would argue that this clearly defines him as a little boy, but from a larger perspective, it defines him as emotionally immature and in need of growing up. He reacts solely according to his own feelings, beliefs and desires with little regard for other people's explanations, feelings and attitudes. Sometimes this is justified, as in the case of his anger towards Tink. When Peter nearly stabs the innocently tricked Lost Boy, his action is less justified. It is the result of blind feeling. Later in the play, when he becomes uncomfortable with the idea of even playing at being a responsible adult, it seems that he is actually more than a little selfish. Finally, however, by the end of the play, he has learned, if only a little bit, that the feelings and attitudes of others are important as well. In other words, in spite of his determination not to, he has grown up - a little.

The second noteworthy aspect to this scene is the further definition of John as a secondary antagonist. Hook is undeniably the prime villain of the piece, but as in Act 1 and throughout the play, John embodies and defines the negative attitude towards girls and women that the play, through the actions and reactions of Peter and the Lost Boys, seems determined to challenge. John, it's plain to see, doesn't have much time for girls. In that sense, he embodies the attitudes of most of society at the time, and perhaps of little boys in particular. By the end of the play, however, he, like Peter, has come to a broader understanding of relationships between males and females and is, perhaps grudgingly, more accepting of the values the female gender brings into the world.

Act 3

Act 3 Summary

The third act is titled *The Mermaids' Lagoon*. A mermaid sits combing her hair on a sunny rock, slipping into the water just as Peter, John, Michael and the Lost Boys make a grab for her. As she disappears, Wendy expresses her disappointment, but Peter assures her that catching a mermaid is very difficult. He then tells Wendy that the rock they're sitting on is called Marooners' Rock and that it's where sea captains abandon, or maroon, sailors who have done naughty things. Suddenly, he and the boys become aware that pirates are approaching. They disappear, and Wendy soon follows.

Smee and another pirate appear in a small dinghy, bringing with them the captured and bound Tiger Lily. They leave her on Marooners' Rock as punishment for having been caught prowling around their ship with a knife. Peter imitates Hook's voice and orders them to free her. At first Smee is skeptical, but then when "Hook" insists, he loosens Tiger Lily's bonds. She slips away. A moment later, the real Hook appears, gloomy with the news that Peter and the Lost Boys have found a mother. When Smee asks what a mother is, Wendy gasps with shock. Hook is instantly alert, but Peter imitates the splash of a mermaid's tail. The pirates relax, believing the gasp came from a mermaid. Hook, meanwhile, struggles to explain what a mother is, finally using a nearby mother bird and her nest of eggs as an illustration.

Smee suggests the pirates kidnap Wendy and make her their mother. Hook thinks it's a wonderful idea. Wendy impulsively shouts out "Never!" Peter again makes the mermaid noise, and the pirates agree that it's a wonderful plan. Hook then asks where Tiger Lily is. Smee explains what happened, and Hook denies he ever gave the order. Peter again speaks in Hook's voice, taunting the suddenly fearful (and evidently cowardly) Hook. Hook and Smee play twenty questions with the "voice" to find out who he really is, leading the over-confident Peter to shout out that he's Peter Pan! Hook orders the pirates into the water to catch him. The Lost Boys come out of hiding. The rest of the pirates appear, and the two sides fight. Meanwhile, Peter fights with Hook, but neither wins. Hook hears the Crocodile coming and flees. The other pirates quickly follow him.

The Lost Boys gather and realize that Peter and Wendy have disappeared. They rationalize that they've already gone home, get in the dinghy abandoned by the pirates and sail away. A moment later, Peter and Wendy emerge from the water, clamber up onto Marooners' Rock and realize that the tide is coming in. Soon they will be drowned. They realize they have to leave, but Wendy says she's too tired to swim and too much of a beginner at flying to save herself. Peter becomes aware of a passing kite that he says everyone had thought was lost. He convinces Wendy to take the tail of the kite in her hands and let herself be carried to safety. She tries to convince him to come too, but he sends her away. After Wendy flies off on the tail of the kite, Peter stands on the rock, aware that the tide is coming in. He comments, "To die will be an awfully big adventure" but then sees the bird's nest referred to by Hook sailing by. He removes the eggs from

it, places them in a hat lost by a pirate and sails away in the nest. When he's gone, the mother bird comes and sits on the hat.

Act 3 Analysis

This act presents the action/adventure side of this particular fairy tale. Within that context, however, there are a few important pieces of foreshadowing. The first is the rescue of Tiger Lily, which foreshadows the pact of mutual protection she and Peter enter into in Act 4. The second is how Peter manipulates Hook, which foreshadows the similar way he tricks Hook in Act 5. The third, and perhaps most important, is Peter's comment about dying. On one level, it foreshadows a moment in Act 5 referred to only in stage directions, a moment at which he misses an opportunity to experience the adventure of a full, loving life. On other levels, this statement can be seen as having a much deeper meaning.

Peter's enthusiasm for the adventure of death could be interpreted as a philosophical statement of a truth that exists outside the play's general thematic context. Death can, and perhaps should, be seen as an adventure to be embraced and not something to be feared. On a level much more relevant to the play as a whole, however, the comment illustrates a key aspect of Peter's character. He is self-centered and hungry for personal excitement. In other words, since he's much more capable of flying than Wendy is, why doesn't he just take off after she rides away on that very convenient kite? He wants the adventure of being close to death, the exciting challenge of finding a way to escape other than flying and possibly (probably) the opportunity to tell the self-dramatizing story of his daring escape to the Lost Boys at dinner that night. In modern terms, Peter might be described as a drama queen or an adrenaline junkie. In terms of the play, however, he is clearly intended to be seen as an ideal of emotional, physical and spiritual freedom, albeit an ideal that pales in significance when placed next to the revered ideal of motherhood the play is determined to present and espouse.

The play's thematic emphasis on this ideal reappears in Smee's perhaps surprising desire for Wendy to become the pirates' mother. This suggests that no one is ever too old to desire, and be grateful for, the unconditional caring the play suggests is embodied in motherhood. There is also perhaps a warning here. If children, and little boys in particular, don't receive mothering and care, they could grow up to be pirates like Smee and the others, selfish reprobates with bad attitudes and a tendency to lose their hats (i.e. the hat into which Peter puts the mother bird's eggs). Speaking of that mother bird, her unruffled acceptance of her new nest at the end of the act can be seen as a symbol of the enduring, constant caring at the core of motherhood. In that context, it also foreshadows Mrs. Darling's ongoing vigilance for her children's return at the beginning of Act 5, which in turn gives lie to Peter's assertion that mothers always forget their lost children. Mrs. Darling doesn't forget; the mother bird doesn't forget. The play is telling children to not forget. Peter, while clearly an ideal of freedom, is perhaps less ideal when it comes to experiences of love.

Act 4, Part 1

Act 4, Part 1 Summary

The fourth act is titled *The Home under the Ground*. Again, stage directions detail the setting - the Lost Boys' underground abode, which includes a small box on a wall that serves as Tink's home. Above them is the forest, where Tiger Lily and the Indians are quietly and unobtrusively standing guard.

Wendy, John, Michael and the Lost Boys eat a pretend meal, which stage directions indicate is the only kind ever needed or eaten in Neverland. One of the boys asks to sit in Peter's chair, and Wendy firmly tells him no. She says that nobody is allowed to sit in "father's" chair when he's not there. The boys all argue, and Wendy sighs with pretend aggravation. Then, she tells the boys to clear the table while she darns their socks.

Up above, Peter arrives and greets Tiger Lily. Their conversation reveals that Tiger Lily is returning the favor Peter did for her when he rescued her from the pirates by guarding the underground home. Peter thanks her and then descends into the cave, where he's greeted by the boys and by Wendy, who is evidently enjoying playing the role of mother and wife. Peter pretends to have caught several tigers while hunting and offers a small bag as proof. The cynical but fearful John can't quite bring himself to call Peter a liar, but Wendy plays the game and compliments Peter on his success. Meanwhile, the boys ask permission to dance. Wendy gives her permission but tells the boys that they first must get into their nightclothes. After the boys have rushed off to change, a nervous Peter asks Wendy for reassurance that it's only pretend that he's their father. Wendy, disappointed that he doesn't want to play the game the same way she does, sadly reassures him that it is. Peter comments that she and Tiger Lily both want to be something to him other than his mother. Wendy says Tiger Lily is right, and Peter asks what it is they want. Wendy says it's not appropriate for a lady to say things like that. From Tink's house comes a nasty little laugh - she's apparently been listening. Peter takes this to mean that she too wants to be something other than his mother. Tink speaks angrily in fairy language, and Wendy just as angrily says that for the first time she and Tink agree.

The Lost Boys return in their nightclothes. After a brief dance and pillow fight, Wendy tells them a bedtime story of Mr. and Mrs. Darling. John and Michael both say they briefly remember their parents. Apparently, life in Neverland is so wonderful that as soon as the boys arrive and start living there, they also start to forget their previous lives. As she continues the story, Wendy seems to also be forgetting her parents. She can't remember whether her father or mother tied up Nana. She doesn't seem perturbed by her lack of memory, however, as she goes on with the story. She tells how the Darlings' children came to Neverland where they met the Lost Boys, who rejoice at being in a story. The story goes on to say that the Darling children stayed in Neverland for years, and at that point Peter, according to stage directions, first becomes interested in the story. Wendy's story then jumps several years into the future, as she describes the

Darling children as adults, returning home from Neverland to find that their mother has, for all those years, left the window in the nursery open in the hope that they'll return. At that moment, Peter interrupts, saying that mothers aren't like that at all. He explains that he flew back to the home he remembered only to find that his mother had barred the window, and there was another little boy in his bed!

John and Michael immediately ask to go home. Wendy too feels fearful and asks Peter to make plans for them to go home. Peter, angry that Wendy wants to leave, says he'll do whatever she likes. He goes up in a huff to talk with Tiger Lily about the arrangements. While he's gone, the Lost Boys beg Wendy to stay, but she refuses. Peter returns, having arranged for Tiger Lily to take Wendy and her brothers through the woods. He says Tink will lead them across the sea. Tink comments angrily from her little house. Peter orders her to do as she's told. Meanwhile, Wendy tells the Lost Boys that if they come with her, she's sure her parents will adopt them. The boys eagerly ask Peter if they can go. Peter, apparently not caring whether they do or not, says they can. They rejoice, but they stop when Peter announces he's not going, saying he wants to stay a little boy forever and always have fun. He urges them to get going, saying pointedly that he hopes they like their mothers.

Act 4, Part 1 Analysis

In contrast to the action-defined narrative of Act 4, this act is defined by development of the play's characters and themes. In terms of the former, the most significant change is in the character of Peter. The truth at the core of his endless childhood is revealed through his story of being closed out of his previous life by his mother. This story is also at the core of his endless childishness, something different from his childhood since childhood is defined by a space of time and childishness is defined by behavior. His story explains why both aspects of his life are the way they are. It must be remembered, however, that more than anything else Peter wants Wendy to stay. This is the reason he tells this story. Not only does he want her to keep mothering him and the boys, but he also cares for her, even though he's not prepared to admit it. He knows that by telling this story, he's closer to convincing her and the boys not to leave. Unfortunately for Peter, his story has the opposite of its intended effect. Wendy, now more than ever, is desperate to return home. In this desire, the play's thematic intent can be seen. Wendy clearly believes, as the play suggests all children should, that their mother's love will never end.

This leads to another major point about this story - that it may not be true. It's possible that things happened the way Peter says they did. If that's the case, there is a vivid insight here into the hurt and disappointment at the heart of Peter's attitudes and actions. It's also possible, however, that given Peter's previously illustrated capacity for self-dramatization and/or lies as well as his desire for Wendy to stay, he's telling a tall tale. His story about the tigers supports this possibility. It is an obvious fantasy constructed to support his self-definition as an authority figure to the boys and as an adventurer. (Is there a parallel here between Peter's fantasy here and Mr. Darling's fantasy about no longer being able to provide for his children in Act 1?) In any case, in

Peter's mind and perhaps in the minds of the Lost Boys, he is being shut out by his mother and forced to live on his own, and this contributes to his image as a rogue and a hero.

This image is at odds with the role Wendy seems determined to place Peter into - that of a responsible, loving father. His resistance to her is a manifestation of his essential childishness, his lack of interest in any kind of responsibility whatsoever. It's ironic that later in the play he takes exactly the kind of responsibility a loving, devoted father would take. This happens three times. First, he finds out that his boys and their "mother" have been kidnapped, and second, he does what he has to do to save the life of his beloved friend Tinker Bell. The third occasion when he takes on father-like responsibility takes place at the end of Act 5, when it becomes clear that he has, at least to some degree, grown up.

At this point in the play, however, Peter is clearly not grown up enough to understand the hints directed at him by Tiger Lily, Wendy and even Tinker Bell. He knows they want something from him, but he has no idea what that might be. The audience, however, knows exactly what it is. They want him to love them and to be a real husband-and-father sort of person, loving and romantic and protective. This is another aspect of the play's perspective on women that might be interpreted as old-fashioned, repressive and sexist - that all women want the strong men in their lives to be their husbands. However, as was the case with the broader perspective on the need for mother-love, which essentially boils down to a need for love in general, the perspective on husband-ism can also boil down to a need to be loved and cared for equally. Wendy wants Peter to care for her as much and as openly as she cares for him. Tink wants Peter to be as devoted to her as she is to him, an aspect to her character that plays a key role in developments in the second half of this act. The powerful and respected leader Tiger Lily clearly sees Peter as an equal and wants to share both her status and her obvious affection in an equal way. Peter, however, as he often says, is a boy who can't and won't grow up. Since equality of the kind that the females here want is impossible in the immature, he is both unwilling and unable to embrace, for lack of a better term, the role these three women-in-waiting clearly wish to place him in.

Act 4, Part 2

Act 4, Part 2 Summary

Before Wendy and the Lost Boys can leave, they hear the sound of an intense and bloody battle coming from above. The pirates are attacking the Indians. There are losses on both sides, but ultimately, the pirates win. Tiger Lily, however, manages to escape. Hook remains, listening at the chimney as Peter tells Wendy that the fight is over and that the Indians are sure to have won. If they did, they will beat their drum. Hook hears this, finds the drum and beats it. Peter and the boys cheer, and Hook motions to the other pirates to be ready.

Peter bids goodbye to Wendy and the boys. One by one, the boys, including John and Michael, climb up out of the house. Tink goes with them, but she is unable to help as they are grabbed by pirates, tied up and hauled off. Tink follows them to find out where they're being taken. Meanwhile, Wendy gives Peter some last minute instructions and leaves a glass with his "medicine" in it. It's only water, but to her, it's still an important part of their mother/father game. Before she goes, Wendy asks Peter what he is to her. Peter tells her that he's her son. Wendy angrily goes out, and she is captured gently by Hook and escorted away with menacing politeness. Peter, meanwhile, goes to bed.

While Peter sleeps, Hook returns, descends into the house, puts a few drops of poison into Peter's "medicine," climbs back upstairs and stalks into the night. Tink flies down into the house, panicking about what she's seen. She wakes Peter and tells him that the Indians have been defeated, that the Lost Boys have been captured and that they and Wendy have all been taken to Hook's ship. Peter immediately vows to rescue them and sharpens his dagger. Meanwhile, Tink has noticed something strange about Peter's medicine and warns Peter, who says it's fine, adding that he promised Wendy he'd take it. Just as he's reaching for the glass, Tink drinks down the medicine and immediately feels the effects of the poison. Her light becomes a little dimmer, and her movements become more erratic. She explains in fairy language to the suddenly frantic Peter what's happened and collapses. She's still able to speak, however, and Peter understands that if all children believed in fairies she might get well again. Peter cries out to all the children in the world and asks them to prove they believe in fairies by clapping their hands. He hears the clapping of the children, and Tink's light brightens. Her voice gets louder, and her movements again become strong and vibrant. Peter cries out his thanks, and he and Tink rush out to rescue Wendy and the boys.

Act 4, Part 2 Analysis

This section contains the three highest points of crisis in the play. The first is the more thematically relevant conversation between Peter and Wendy about what he sees himself as in relation to her. As discussed in relation to the previous section, Wendy is eager for Peter to become a husband/father figure and to see the love she offers as

being more than that of a mother. In other words, she wants what the play seems interested in presenting as the deeper, transcendent, unconditional love of one valued human being for another. Because of his essential childishness and irresponsibility, however, Peter is unwilling and/or unable to do respond in the way she so obviously wants him to. He is not yet willing to be even a little grown-up, but he quickly changes his attitude when confronted with danger to those for whom he cares. That comes later. First Peter must experience the second point of crisis in this scene - the near-death of Tinker Bell.

This scene is important on several levels. First, it displays the depths of Tink's devotion to Peter. Secondly, it awakens in Peter an awareness of that devotion. He realizes that he has to do something to recognize that devotion, and he gains the sense of responsibility to act on that realization. In that sense, his actions here foreshadow his taking of similar responsibility to rescue the Lost Boys at the end of the act and also the responsibility for enabling Wendy's return to her distraught mother at the end of the play. The scene is also important because Peter's plea for the help of children to save Tink's life is easily one of the most famous scenes in the history of theater.

Traditionally, when either this play or the musical version of it is performed, members of the audience clap their hands in response to Peter's plea to revive Tinker Bell. However, nowhere in the text does it say outright that the audience is involved. In the actual script the applause is imagined, but in performance, something different happens - something that's perhaps as magical as Tink's revival. For some reason, the applause becomes real. When they hear Peter's plea, adults and children alike burst into intense, almost desperate applause. The reason for this is that the audience, in the same way as they're willing to believe that at the end of Act 1, Part 2 the children can fly, is also willing to believe that a simple expression of hope, support, affection and love can re-awaken life. This is another expression of the play's core theme that love, not just maternal love but love in any form, is truly the most transcendent, life affirming, joyful emotion there can be. In short, everybody claps because everybody loves, and everybody wants to be loved in the way Tink is loved. Everybody believes in fairies ... or at least wants to.

The third point of crisis in this section is the more plot-relevant kidnapping of Wendy and the boys, an attack from Hook that sets the stage for Peter's counterattack in Act 5, Part 1 and his eventual, climactic confrontation with Hook.

Act 5, Scene 1

Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

This scene is called *The Pirate Ship*. Late at night on Hook's pirate ship, *The Jolly Roger*, a few sailors stand watch as Hook paces. He speaks to himself about how most children are safe asleep in their beds while the children he's keeping prisoner are about to be executed. After giving voice to more nasty thoughts about children, he calls for the Lost Boys to be brought out. When the terrified boys are all on deck, Hook says that two of them can save their lives by becoming cabin boys. The boys tell him that their mother wouldn't be happy if they became pirates. For a moment, Michael and John are tempted, but when they learn that they would have to be disrespectful to the king, they decline.

Hook orders that "their mother" be brought up. Wendy is shoved out onto the deck. Hook gives her an opportunity to speak to her "children" one last time, and Wendy urges them to die like English gentlemen. The boys are eagerly determined to do as their mother commands. Hook orders that Wendy be tied up, and the boys prepare for their executions. Everything stops, however, when the tick-tick-tick of the Crocodile is heard. The pirates react with fear, but the boys react with hope, since they alone can see that the sound is in fact Peter imitating the Crocodile. Peter motions for the boys to be quiet and stops making the ticking noise. Smee comments that the Crocodile is gone. Peter disappears, and Hook sings and dances with awful happiness at the thought of the executions he's about to witness. In desperation, the boys counter him by singing "God Save the King." Hook orders that the boys be subdued by a whipping and tells a pirate to fetch the whip. The pirate goes into Hook's cabin.

Hook dances some more but suddenly stops when he hears a shriek of horror from within the cabin followed by a triumphant crowing. The boys (and the audience) recognize the sound as coming from Peter. Another pirate goes in to see what happened and reports that the first pirate is dead. Hook orders him to go in and capture the "doodle-do" that's killing the pirates and making the crowing noise, but the pirate at first refuses. Hook threatens him with his hook, and the pirate goes in. There's another screech and another crowing. More pirates are sent in, and there is more screeching and more crowing. Finally, Hook himself goes in, carrying a lantern. Everyone waits tensely ... and then Hook comes out, saying that something blew out his lantern. The pirates react with fear and appear about to mutiny, apparently blaming Hook's evil deeds for the presence of death on their ship. Meanwhile, the Lost Boys are cheering. Hook immediately sends them into the cabin. The boys, knowing it's Peter in the cabin, only pretend to be fearful as they're shoved through the door. Hook and the remaining pirates listen so intently that they don't notice when the boys, freed by Peter from their ropes and armed with whatever weapons they could find, sneak back out on deck and hide. Neither do the pirates notice when Peter frees Wendy, putting on her cloak and taking her place as she hides. Hook, meanwhile, realizes there's no more killing happening and suddenly remembers that it's bad luck to have a female on a pirate ship.

He and the pirates prepare to throw Wendy overboard, saying there's no one who can save her. Peter cries out that there's one person who can - Peter Pan!

Peter throws off the cloak and calls forth the Lost Boys. The battle is on! The boys and the pirates fight, with the boys winning and eventually surrounding Hook, who uses Michael as a shield. Peter tells the boys to back off and that Hook is his. Hook puts Michael down, and he and Peter fight. They strike and parry with skill and speed, apparently equally matched, but then Peter knocks Hook's sword out of his hand. Hook reaches for it, and Peter steps on his hand. Hook cries out in anger, and then Peter steps back, picks up Hook's sword and in gentlemanly fashion hands it back. Hook, in frustration and despair, cries out for Peter to explain who and what he is! Peter also cries out: "I'm youth, I'm joy, I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg!"

Hook resumes the fight and is almost beaten, but then Hook shouts that he's going to blow up the ship and runs out. The boys cry out to Peter to save them, but Peter too runs out. Hook returns, having set the explosion and ignoring the boys' cries for mercy. Peter reappears with Hook's bomb in his hand and tosses it into the water. Hook rushes at him and at the other boys, but they all evade him by flying into the ship's rigging. Hook, aware that he's completely beaten, gives up and jumps into the sea, where the ticking Crocodile awaits its dinner.

Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

On one level, this scene is essentially one of action and thrills, suspense and defiance. In that sense, it is the play's narrative climax, the high point of the conflict between the boys and the pirates, as well as the specific, much more personal conflict between Peter and Hook. Tension and excitement build as Hook struggles to gain the upper hand (or hook, as the case may be). Peter repeatedly outwits him, and Hook eventually realizes the futility of his struggle and surrenders to the inevitable - becoming the main course for the hungry Crocodile. The high point of this particular conflict, and therefore of the conflict as a whole, is Peter's triumphant cry that he is "youth" and "joy," a point at which one of the play's secondary themes, relating to the joys of youth, also reaches its climax.

Because Hook represents the adulthood that Peter is so desperate to avoid, Peter's final victory symbolizes Peter's victory over that adulthood. He never wants to be a man. If he has his way, he will never be a man, and by killing Hook, he is proclaiming that the threat of his being a man is over. This thematically relevant aspect of Peter's story, and of the play bearing his name, is embodied in his final cry of victory. In this moment, as it has to varying degrees throughout the narrative, the play makes the point that boyish, youthful joy is a wonderful value that must be cherished. It also makes the point in the final act that there are other equally wonderful values equally worthy of being cherished.

Act 5, Scene 2

Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is titled *The Nursery and the Tree Tops*. The setting for this scene is the same as Act 1. Mrs. Darling dozes by the open window, but she suddenly wakes from a dream in which the children came home. She realizes that she was only dreaming, and then she sadly thanks Nana for, as always, preparing their beds for them. Her words reveal that Mrs. Darling is there every night, waiting for the children. The maid comes in and announces that dinner is ready. Conversation reveals that Mr. Darling, in remorse at having banished Nana from the nursery on the night the children disappeared, now sleeps and eats in Nana's kennel, which has been placed outside. As the maid goes out, Mr. Darling comes in, describing how he's always followed by people ridiculing him for having been so careless as to lose his children. He then retreats into his kennel for a nap. He asks Mrs. Darling to play the piano for him and to close the window because he feels a draft. Mrs. Darling tells him that the window must always remain open in the hopes that the children will come back, and then she goes into the next room, where she plays the piano.

Peter and Tink fly in, closing the window so that when Wendy and her brothers return, they will think he was right about their mother and fly back to Neverland with them. They try to figure out how to get out without using the window and try various doors. Through one door, Peter sees Mrs. Darling crying for Wendy, and he believes that she wants the window left open. At first he refuses, but then he realizes how fond she is of Wendy. He suddenly decides that mothers are silly and then flies out, leaving the window open.

A few moments later, Wendy, John and Michael land on the windowsill. Their memories of life in the nursery quickly return, but they're confused as to why their father is sleeping in the kennel and upset that their mother isn't waiting. They hear the piano, look through the door and wonder who the lady is. Then, they realize that she's their mother. They argue briefly over how to tell her they're back, and Wendy decides that the gentlest way is best. She climbs into bed, and the boys do the same. Mrs. Darling stops playing, comes in and sees the children in their beds. Then, she comments that she must be dreaming the way she's done ever since they've been gone. The children rush into her arms, and there's a joyful reunion. Stage directions comment that Peter, watching from outside, doesn't understand why everyone is so happy.

A few moments later, Mr. and Mrs. Darling greet the Lost Boys. One of them seems left out, but the maid says he belongs to her. She "feel[s] it in her bones." Meanwhile, Wendy sees Peter and asks whether there's anything he wants said to her parents. Peter says no. Mrs. Darling offers to adopt him as well, but when Peter finds out that he'll have to go to school and eventually become a man, he says that he wants to stay a little boy forever. Stage directions comment that this is "his greatest pretend." Wendy comments that he'll be lonely, but Peter tells her he'll spend his time with Tink. Wendy asks to go with him, but her mother refuses to let her go. When she sees how upset

Wendy is, however, she gives permission for Wendy to visit once a year and help Peter with his spring cleaning. This means more to Wendy than it does to Peter, who is gone almost before Wendy has a chance to say goodbye.

The scene changes back to Neverland, where a year later Wendy has finished her spring cleaning visit. Stage directions indicate that she's physically matured, while Peter has remained the same. Wendy says she'd love to take him back with her and moves to embrace him, but he backs away. She realizes what this means and says, "Yes I know." Then, she flies off for home. Narration describes how Peter almost understands what she means but doesn't quite, adding that if he did his cry might be: "To live would be an awfully big adventure!"

Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

This scene contains the climax of the play's principle theme relating to love in general and the love of mothers in particular. It also contains the high point of Peter's journey of transformation into (admittedly limited) adulthood, as he comes to realize that everything he believed, or at least wanted to believe, about the fickleness of mother-love is wrong. His sense of self-importance is such that he cannot admit that he was wrong, but he does let go of that self-importance enough to recognize the depth and truth of Mrs. Darling's love and the fairness of Wendy's desire to return home. He still isn't able to let go of his "greatest pretend," admitting that deep down he wants the genuine unchanging love embodied by Mrs. Darling as much as Wendy does. In this way, however, the play accomplishes both its ends - celebrating and idealizing boyhood at the same time as it celebrates and idealizes mother love, and love in general.

In Wendy's final lines to Peter, what is it that she "knows"? It seems that she too has grown up, not just physically but emotionally. She's now mature enough and wise enough to see that Peter cannot and will not be touched by any kind of genuine human affection, in either physical or emotional terms. In this case, it's possible to see why, after realizing the truth about Mrs. Darling's love for her children, he describes her and all mothers as silly. He is essentially distancing himself from emotional contact as he's distancing himself from physical contact when he backs away from Wendy.

Wendy "knows" this, and it's evidence of her new maturity that instead of becoming petulant as she does in Act 3, she responds with maturity and a kind of sad grace that makes Peter's youthful defiance seem a little pathetic by comparison. This perspective on Peter's attitude is borne out by the last line of stage direction, which suggests that by rejecting the love he is offered, Peter is in fact rejecting life. Mrs. Darling embraces it. Her children embrace it. The Lost Boys embrace it. Even Mr. Darling embraces it. Peter Pan, though, the boy who can't and won't grow up, prefers the life of pirates and mermaids and Indians, of adventure and impulse, of irresponsibility and play. In the world of Neverland, he not only never grows up ... he never simply grows. Still, somewhere inside himself, in another kind of neverland that he would never admit exists, he knows that what he wants and needs and is desperate to live is a life filled with the love that for him always dwells behind someone else's window.

Characters

Mr. George Darling

Mr. Darling is married to Mary Darling and is the father of the Darling children. A childish man, he is rather brusque to his children and Nana. Mr. Darling tries to trick Michael into taking his medicine by not taking his own. He also insists on tying up Nana outside which leads to Peter Pan taking the children to Never Land. Mr. Darling does pay the price in the end: he is forced to live in Nana's kennel while the children are missing. He is remorseful for his actions and is happy when they return.

John Darling

John is the middle Darling child. When *Peter Pan* opens, he does not like girls nor does he want to bathe. He plays house with his sister Wendy and only responds positively when she announces their child is a boy. When Peter comes, John is excited to learn to fly and go to Never Land to fight pirates. Still, he is the first to want to go home when Wendy tells her story about their parents. John has a sense of pride about his heritage. He refuses to be a pirate when he learns he would have denounce the British king.

Mrs. Mary Darling

Mrs. Darling is the loving mother of the Darling children. Where her husband loses his temper, she is patient and kind with both George and the children. Mrs. Darling is the first to have noticed Peter Pan's face in the window and fears for her children's safety. She is devastated when her worst fears are confirmed and is ecstatic when they return.

Michael Darling

Michael is the youngest of the Darling children and the littlest when the arrive in Never Land. He is obstinate and does not want to go to bed or take his medicine. When Peter comes into their nursery, he is the first to fly. During the battle on the pirate ship, Michael kills a pirate. When they finally return home, Michael is slightly confused as to who his mother really is and he is also disappointed to find that his father is smaller than the pirate he killed.

Wendy Darling

Wendy Darling is a young girl for whom Peter Pan shows great affection. She is the eldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Darling. Wendy likes to play house, even before Peter convinces her to fly to Never Land. She is a fairly obedient and helpful child, mindful of her responsibilities. For example, Wendy helps her father get Michael to take his

medicine and is quick to point out when her father tries to cheat. When Peter finds his shadow in a drawer and cannot reattach it, Wendy solves the problem and sews it back on for him. In Never Land, Wendy takes the role of the Lost Boys' mother very seriously, though she says she has no experience. She does her best to fulfill the role, but when she realizes how much her absence must hurt her own mother, she insists on returning home bringing along the Lost Boys so they can be adopted.

Wendy is also patient and kind. She tries to teach Peter about kissing but does not embarrass him when it is obvious he does not know what she is talking about. When Peter is uncomfortable about being the boys' father, Wendy accepts this, too. Wendy also has a whimsical side: she desperately wants to catch a mermaid.

First Twin

See The Lost Boys

Captain Jas Hook

Captain Hook is a pirate who lives in Never Land. He is the mortal enemy of Peter Pan because Peter severed his arm in a battle and fed it to a crocodile. Hook spends the play trying to enact revenge on Peter Pan and the Lost Boys. When one of his pirate band learns that Peter has Wendy, he captures her, hoping to make her the mother for the ship. Hook also succeeds in capturing the Darling brothers and the Lost Boys, but when Peter and Hook fight their final battle, Hook loses and is eaten by a crocodile.

Hunkering

See The Lost Boys

The Lost Boys

The six Lost Boys live in Never Land, and include Peter Pan among their number as their leader. They are boys who had fallen out of their carriages when their nurses were not looking. No one claimed them and after seven days, they were sent to Never Land. Since they have no mother, they are excited by Wendy's presence and do everything to please her. Following Peter's lead, they also defend her. When given the opportunity to go home and be adopted by the Darling family, they return to England.

Nana

Nana is dog employed as a nurse in the Darling household. She gives the children their medicine, puts them to bed, and tends to their needs much like a human nanny.

Nibs

See The Lost Boys

Peter Pan

Peter Pan is the ageless boy who is at the play's center. He ran away from home when he found out what kind of responsibilities he would have as an adult. He does not want to grow up at all. As the captain of the Lost Boys, however, he does lead them and tell them stories. He also takes it upon himself to find them a mother, which he does in bringing Wendy to Never Land. Despite his actions to the contrary, Peter professes his disdain for responsibility. When Wendy sets him up as the Boy's father, he does not want the position. He tells Wendy that he looks upon her as his mother also.

Peter's refusal to grow up also affects his memory. He cannot remember incidents for very long after they happen. He is also ignorant of basic human interactions such as kissing and tells Wendy he can never be touched. But Peter is not afraid to fight. When Tiger Lily is in jeopardy, he saves her. When Wendy and the Lost Boys are captured by Captain Hook, he battles and saves them. For the most part, however, Peter is content to play his pipes and make merriment.

Second Twin

See The Lost Boys

Slightly

See The Lost Boys

Tootles

See The Lost Boys

Tiger Lily

Tiger Lily is an Indian who leads a tribe of men in Never Land. She is a friend of Peter Pan's. When he rescues her from Captain Hook, she repays the favor by guarding his underground home.

Tinkerbell

Tinkerbell is a fairy who is the size of a fist. She got her name because she mends fairy pots and kettles. She appears as a ball of light who can dart quickly around rooms, and speaks only in bells. She is attached to Peter Pan, and follows him around everywhere. Tinkerbell is rather jealous of Wendy and tries to subvert the affection Peter Pan shows for her. She also risks her life for Peter, swallowing poison meant for him.

Themes

Sex Roles

Sex roles, especially motherhood, are explored in*Peter Pan.* Peter convinces Wendy to come to Never Land so she can see a mermaid, but he really wants her to act as a mother to himself and the Lost Boys. She is to tell them stories, like her own mother tells to her. Though Wendy admits she has no experience playing a mother role, she imitates her own mother's behavior and manages to win the boys over.

Peter is unwilling to play father to Wendy's mother, however. He will accept the role if it is just "pretend," but he is unwilling to accept actual responsibility. Though the exact role of "father" is not clearly defined in the play□Mr. Darling is more of a temperamental child than a nurturing, paternal figure□Peter is only willing to serve as the primary defender of the Lost Boys' home, little more. He is more concerned with adventure, having fun, and fighting pirates□aspects that conveniently fit into his role as a protector. Peter does not understand what being a father means. John tells the other Lost Boys at one point, "He did not even know how to be a father till I showed him." Peter tells Wendy, in roundabout fashion, that he only knows how to be a son, which frustrates other characters such as Tiger Lily.

Duty & Responsibility

Duty and responsibility□or a lack thereof□ drive the actions of many characters in *Peter Pan.* Peter Pan wants to avoid all adult responsibility and goes to great lengths to achieve this goal. He refuses to play father to Wendy's mother, uncomfortable even when pretending the role. In the end, when Wendy and her brothers decide to go back home, Peter will not let himself be adopted by the Darlings as the other Lost Boys are. If he went back, he would eventually have to grow up, assume responsibility, and become a man. This is unacceptable to Peter so he stays alone in Never Land, and Wendy comes back annually to do his spring cleaning. Despite his fear of adulthood, Peter does his duty as captain of the Lost Boys and protector of Wendy (and Tiger Lily). He rescues all of them from Captain Hook's band of pirates. He can only be responsible in these types of situations.

Conversely, Wendy, Tiger Lily, and even Captain Hook exhibit a sense of responsibility. When each is in a leadership role□be it mother, Indian chief, or head pirate□they act as their duties require them. Even the Lost Boys fulfill their responsibilities as followers of Peter. But only Wendy has a duty-related dilemma. She realizes that she is a daughter. As eldest child and the one who led her brothers away to Never Land, Wendy comes to understand that her own parents might need their children. Wendy must fulfill her role as daughter and go back home because other people, besides the Lost Boys and Peter Pan, need her. She solves her dilemma by inviting everyone to come and live with the Darling family.

Good and Evil

In *Peter Pan,* the lines between good and evil seem clearly drawn on the surface. Peter, the Lost Boys, Wendy, and her brothers, as well as Tiger Lily and the Indians, are on the side of good. Captain Hook and his pirates are evil. They are pirates, an occupation that requires certain antisocial, criminal behaviors. Yet the distinction between good and evil is not as clearly defined as it initially appears. The Indians are after scalps when they encounter the pirates. Employing methods of questionable honor, Peter does lead Wendy and her brothers away from their home. Tinkerbell is jealous of Wendy and while she does heroically save Peter, she also tries on several occasions to cause Wendy considerable harm.

The antagonists of *Peter Pan* are more distinctly "bad," but they are also not as clearly developed as Peter, the Darling children, or the Lost Boys. In their limited time on stage, they are only shown scheming or fighting. Yet there is indication that they have more rounded characters. Like Peter and the Lost Boys, they also desire a mother, suggesting that much of their behavior might be tempered by a female influence. Yet because Barrie took more time in developing his protagonists, their motivations, while still essentially good, are more complex than Hook and the Pirates'.

Style

Setting

Peter Pan is a children's fantasy/adventure set in turn-of- the-century London and an imaginary place called Never Land. The action that takes place in London is focused in the nursery of the Darling household, located in the borough of Bloomsbury. Never Land is an island, and the action in these scenes takes place in the forest, including shelters both above and below ground; there is also a lagoon where mermaids swim. The other Never Land location is Captain Hook's pirate ship, the Jolly Roger, where the play's climactic battle takes place. These diverse settings emphasize the difference between reality and fantasy. Though the Darling household has a dog for a nanny (a slightly fantastic notion), the household is predominantly rooted in sober reality; order prevails within the home. In Never Land, there is no mature authority so the island features forest, lagoons, and pirate ships□things that appeal to a child's sense of adventure and fun. There is very little order or responsibility; the Lost Boys and the pirates are dutiful followers of their respective leaders, but there is little organization beyond obedience on the field of battle.

Special Effects

Peter Pan features numerous special effects to emphasize the fantastic elements, especially of the otherworldly Tinkerbell and Peter. Tinkerbell is a fairy. In the earliest productions, she was not played by a person but was merely a lighting effect (some latter-day productions have employed an actor to portray Tinkerbell, mostly informed by Walt Disney' s animated adaptation of the play which depicted the fairy as an actual, tiny person). Tinkerbell often appeared as a ball of light created by light hitting an angled mirror, her voice a splash of bells. As little more than light and sound effects, Tinkerbell could appear otherworldly to the audience, able to flit about the stage very quickly. Like the fairy, Peter exhibits extra-human characteristics: he is able to fly, he is ageless, and much about his person defies reason□such as his shadow being detached from his body.

The special effects are an essential part of Barrie's play and a primary reason for its popularity among generations of audiences. For a production to be effective, the play must realistically present such things as Peter flying, a dog that acts human, and a magical fairy. Most productions of *Peter Pan* employ some type of wire and pulley system that enables stagehands to lift the actors off the ground and move them about as if they are flying. Nana the dog-nanny is frequently played by a human in costume. Various lighting and sound effects are used to convey Tinkerbell's presence and fairy-like abilities. If properly executed, these effects heighten the sense of fantasy and fun in the play.

Foreshadowing: Mother's Instinct

When the dramatic technique of foreshadowing is used in Barrie's play, it is most often in conjunction with mothers and mothering; maternal insights usually telegraph important events in the play. Mrs. Darling had previously seen Peter in the window when tucking her children into bed and reading them stories. She is reluctant to go out to dinner with her husband in Act I because of what she has seen. Her worst fears are realized when Peter does come back for his shadow and convinces the children to come to Never Land. When Wendy assumes the role of mother to the Lost Boys and her own little brothers, she, too, develops a mature instinct. While telling her "children" a story about her home, she realizes, with the help of John, that her mother probably misses her and that they must return home.

Historical Context

At the turn of the twentieth century, Great Britain was a formidable world power, controlling territory on nearly every continent. Queen Victoria ruled the country from 1837 until her death in 1901, and her influence on Great Britain was still felt in 1904 though her son Edward VII was on the throne. The Edwardian era was extravagant for those with money, but the difference between the rich and the poor was a sharply divided line. Though the United States was still a developing nation, its industrial power gave it a burgeoning reputation.

While London was the center of several international markets, including currency and commodities, there was economic doubt and tension after years of prosperity due to the Industrial Revolution of the late-nineteenth century. Certain commodities suffered while others prospered. Farmers who grew grains did not do as well as dairy or fruit farmers. Industry moved towards consolidations and concentrations of power, but exports continued to fall. Still, London was the capital of finance and banking, and this market made up for the overall trade deficits in other areas. The national average income continued to increase, but the gap between classes continued to grow.

Despite wage increases, there was a movement among laborers in Great Britain to organize. Both skilled and unskilled workers joined unions in record numbers to address their concerns. Many labor leaders professed socialist and Marxist beliefs. A political party often sympathetic to many of the concerns of workers and lower classes was the Liberal party. When they won parliamentary control in 1906, they addressed many social reform concerns. They made free meals available to poor schoolchildren and founded a medical service to address those children's health concerns. Still, poverty was widespread in England, with one study showing that 27% of the population of York lived below the poverty line.

One source of controversy in both Great Britain and the United States was the use of child labor in factories and mills. In the United States there was a call for regulations on the number of hours a child could work as well as a call for mandatory attendance at school. In 1904, the National Child Labor Committee was formed in the United States. The first child labor law was passed in the United States in 1908.

Women also worked in these factories and rarely received the same wages as men; women's job opportunities were limited to certain sectors as society still believed a woman's place was in the home. Some women in the United States demanded the right to vote to address these and other concerns while others organized their own unions and formed other groups to promote their agendas, which often focused on social welfare. The Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was formed in the United States in 1903. A similar voting and social reform-minded organization was formed that same year in Britain. Called the Women's Social and Political Union, its leadership called for violent acts against unsympathetic forces and hunger strikes among its members to dramatize its message.

Critical Overview

When *Peter Pan* was first produced in London in 1904, it was an immediate success. Though it broke box-office records, its producers were unsure if the play would be successful at all because it was so unlike anything that had been staged before. Barrie was regarded as a genius in his day, not just for the childlike insights that inform *Peter Pan* but also for a number of the other plays the prolific author wrote. Max Beerbohm, writing in the *Saturday Review,* said: "I know not anyone who remains, like Mr. Barrie, a child. It is this unparalleled achievement that informs so much of Mr. Barrie's later work, making it unique. This, too, surely is what makes Mr. Barrie the most fashionable playwright of his time. Undoubtedly, *Peter Pan* is the best thing he has done□the thing most directly from within himself. Here, at last, we see his talent in its full maturity."

Contemporary critics noted that the play has appeal for both children and adults. A reviewer from the *Illustrated London News* wrote: "There has always been much in Mr. Barrie's work, of the child for whom romance is the true reality and that which children of a larger growth called knowledge. Insofar as the play deals with real life, we think it a bit cruel."

Many critics praised Barrie for not condescending to children, for dealing frankly with the cruelties of real life. In his book *The Road to Never Land: A Reassessment of J. M. Barrie's Dramatic Art,* R. D. S. Jack argued, *"Peter Pan,* by highlighting the cruelty of children, the power-worship of adults, the impossibility of eternal youth, the inadequacy of narcissistic and bisexual solutions, presents a very harsh view of the world made palatable by humour and held at an emotional distance by wit and the dream." Jack concluded, *"Peter Pan* addresses children but it treats childhood neither sentimentally nor as a condition divorced from adulthood."

Other critics have found that some aspects of Peter Pan are overly sentimental, especially those scenes taking place in the Darling household. Defensive of such accusations, Roger Lancelyn Green, in his *Fifty Years of Peter Pan,* wrote: "Sometimes, be it admitted, he [Barrie] approached perilously near the borderlands of sentimentality: such moments are seized upon with uncritical zeal as examples of typical Barrie, and the whole condemned for the occasional blemish."

Peter Pan has also been examined by critics more closely from other angles. In *The Road to Never Land,* Jack explored *Peter Pan* in terms of a Barrie-created mythology. He wrote: "Barrie was intent on devising a structure which combined the demands of an artificial, perspectivist creation-myth with those of a drama addressing both adults and children."

Others have used psychological approaches to understand *Peter Pan* and what the play says about its author. Many critics believed that Barrie himself did not want to grow up and that the play is an extension of his own experiences. Green wrote in *J. M. Barrie: A Walck Monograph,* that "all of Barrie's life 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." Critics have explored Barrie's complex relationship with the Davies family and his own mother, seeking to understand his motivations in the creation of *Peter Pan.*

Several critics have focused specifically on the themes of motherhood that pervade the play, arguing that Barrie idealizes mothers to a fault while fathers are portrayed as unloving. John D. Shout in*Modern Drama,* believed that Barrie used *Peter Pan* to further an agenda. He wrote, *"Peter Pan* may have come to life as a bunch of tales to beguile Barrie's young friends the Davies boys, but it ended up much more a sequence of object lessons for young women, and a far more artful set of lessons than the old manuals since the women are paying attention and can hardly suspect that they're being preached to." In the same essay, Shout added, "adult males in this play are simply cowards or cads which only serves further to elevate the women." This dichotomy continues to be a source of critical debate regarding *Peter Pan*.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso discusses the idealized depiction of women and the unfavorable depiction of adult men in Barrie's play.

Many critics have argued that *Peter Pan* idealizes women, especially in their roles as mothers. By idealize, critics mean Barrie oversimplifies them, seeing them only as mothers rather than well-rounded human beings. While Barrie does idealize women, the female characters are not so simple. By looking at the main female characters, how they are idealized, and the development of their roles within the play, it becomes clear that they are complex idealizations. Barrie emphasizes this complexity by contrasting the women with his less favorable depictions of adult males; the men in his play are silly and in dire need of mothering.

Mrs. Mary Darling is the most idealized female character in *Peter Pan.* She is the epitome of motherhood. She has sacrificed her wedding dress to make coverlets for her children's beds. She dislikes going out or socializing, preferring to stay at home with her children. When she has to go out, as she does in Act I for her husband's job, she is reluctant to leave and believes that something is wrong. She even acts like a mother to her husband. When he cannot tie his tie, she does it for him, soothing his anger like she would a small child. In Act V, scene ii, when the children return home, she agrees to adopt all the Lost Boys and even offers to adopt Peter. When Peter refuses, she will not allow Wendy to go back with him to Never Land but only to visit once a year to do his spring cleaning.

Mrs. Darling is the baseline for women in *Peter Pan.* She could be no more perfectly written for such a role: she is polite and giving, without faults, desires, or ambitions, except those that relate to her children.

In many ways, Wendy is her mother's daughter. About eight- or ten- years-old, Wendy likes to play house with her brother John. When her father tries to convince her brother Michael to take his medicine, she is the one to immediately help him deal with the situation. After Peter Pan enters the nursery and explains the situation with his shadow, Wendy solves the problem and sews it on for him. Wendy is a junior version of Mrs. Darling.

But when Wendy is in Never Land, she proves that she is more than a petite version of her mother. She does act as mother to the Lost Boys□though she admits "I am only a little girl; I have no real experience"□though her actions are not solely motivated by the interests of her "children." She wants to swim with mermaids, though Peter warns her they like to drown children. In Act IV, Peter becomes uncomfortable with being the father to Wendy's mother, even if it is only pretend. Wendy knows there is more to these kinds of relationships, a fact unclear in the depiction of Mrs. Darling. When Wendy asks Peter, "What are your exact feelings for me, Peter?," he replies, "Those of a devoted son." This upsets Wendy, but she cannot tell him what she wants him to be exactly because

"It isn't for a lady to tell." This statement reveals Wendy's desires as well as an understanding of the mores in male/female interactions in her relationship with Peter.

In Never Land, women, including Wendy, are allowed to be more complex, perhaps because it is a fantasy land that exists outside of the rigid social conventions of England in the early-twentieth century. Tiger Lily is a prime example of Never Land's empowered females. Though she is a minor character, Tiger Lily is not a mother or surrogate nurturer; she is an Indian leader, the daughter of an Indian chief. Barrie describes her as "the belle of the Piccaninny tribe, whose braves would all have her to wife, but she wards them off with a hatchet." In Act II, when she learns pirates are in the area, she wants to attack them and collect their scalps. They lose this battle, and Tiger Lily nearly dies in the process. Peter Pan steps in and saves them, and Tiger Lily and her men act as guards to the underground home of Peter, Wendy, and the Lost Boys.

These are not the typical acts of a woman (let alone a mother) in this time period. Like Wendy, Tiger Lily wants Peter to be fulfill a relationship with her other than as a son. Peter tells Wendy of the similarity, reporting that "Tiger Lily is just the same; there is something or other she wants me to be, but she says it is not my mother."

Tinkerbell, the fairy, is more like Tiger Lily than Mrs. Darling or Wendy. Though in the earliest stage production Tinker Bell was no more than a reflection off a piece of glass, she nevertheless has a multi-faceted personality. Her primary loyalty is to Peter Pan, and she does not want anyone to interfere with it. Unlike any other female character in *Peter Pan,* Tinkerbell displays jealousy, especially towards Wendy, and acts on it regularly. She pulls Wendy's hair and tricks the Lost Boys into shooting Wendy with an arrow. Even when Wendy wants to go back home, Tinkerbell is reluctant to aid her in any way. Also, whenever Peter, or anyone else for that matter, says something that Tinkerbell thinks is stupid, her response, in the fairy language, always translates as "you silly ass." Like Tiger Lily, Tinkerbell also exhibits considerable bravery, swallowing the poison intended for Peter at the end of Act IV. Also like Tiger Lily, the fairy has an occupation that is not directly related to motherhood. Tinkerbell is so named, as Peter explains to Wendy, "because she mends the fairy pots and kettles."

The primary female characters in *Peter Pan* are not merely idealized stereotypes. They are much more, albeit in the safety of a fantasy world. Though this aspect implies that "real" women do not act this way, there is another angle in which to explore Barrie' s idealization of women: via their male counterparts in the play. Barrie's women are defined by what his men are not. The adult males in *Peter Pan* need women and make them look like the paragons of sensibility, adding a luster to their ideal portrait.

Both Mr. Darling and Captain Hook are rather childish and incompetent in their own way. Mr. Darling is easily frustrated over such simple acts as tying his tie. A little later in the same act, he is desperate to get his son Michael to take his dose of medicine. While telling Michael to be a man, Mr. Darling proceeds to fake taking his own bitter medicine in an attempt to trick the child into swallowing his. It does not work, and Mr. Darling's other children catch him in the lie. Mr. Darling continues to try to deceive his children, trying to turn his cowardice into a joke by putting some of the potion in Nana's bowl. Mr.

Darling's frustrations come to head, and he finally insists on locking Nana outside like a "proper dog." This leads directly to Peter Pan leading the children away from home and into Never Land.

Mr. Darling is glib, heartless, and immature, quite the opposite of his wife. Though he feels repentant enough to live in Nana's dog kennel the whole time the children are gone, he suggests in Act V, scene ii, that they close the nursery window. This is significant for this is the window through which the children left, and Mrs. Darling believes, correctly, they will come back. Mr. Darling fails to comprehend such a notion and, on the whole, does not understand much of anything.

Captain Hook is a bit more perceptive than Mr. Darling, but he lives in the fantasy world of Never Land. Barrie describes him as courageous with but two exceptions, "the sight of his own blood, which is thick and of an unusual color" and crocodiles. Because of a previous battle with Peter, Hook has a hook in place of one of his hands. Like Mr. Darling, Hook's plans are based on trickery. He wants to kill the Lost Boys by poisoning some cake and leaving it out for them. This plan fails because of Wendy's mothering. Indeed, when Hook finds out that Peter and the Lost Boys have a mother in Wendy, he plans on capturing them, killing the boys, and making her the pirates' mother. Hook's desire is that of a boy, not the grown man he is appears to be. The Captain is also easily tricked by Peter on a number of occasions, making him more like a boy than a man.

If these are adult male role models, it is no wonder that Peter Pan has no desire to grow up. He is already more of a man than either of them, in a way. He wins battles, defends his home, and goes on adventures. But as much as Barries idealizes women, however complexly, Peter Pan ultimately rejects full-time mothering. He refuses to be adopted by the Darlings and the ideal mother, Mary. No matter how idealistic Barrie's depiction of women may be, though, the fact that Peter rejects such domesticity undercuts his message in a very profound way.

Source: A. Petrusso, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In this review of a 1987 revival production of Peter Pan, *Bemrose examines the prevailing fascination with Barrie's character and his exploits. The critic terms the playwright's tale as timeless and, ofthis production, states "this Peter Pan generates magic" and "compels belief."*

Peter Pan, the boy who refused to grow up, has flourished in the hearts of children and adults since he first took flight 83 years ago. The stage and book versions, written by Englishman J.M. Barrie, have never been entirely out of fashion. But now a new generation is learning to love Peter Pan□and his struggle with the villainous Captain Hook. For many Canadians, the highwater mark of the current revival is the Shaw Festival's spectacular production at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont., which opened Aug. 14. But publishers, too, have been getting in on the action. Montreal's Tundra Books has just released *The Eternal Peter Pan,* the first volume of a trilogy of Pan-related books. As well, the rights to Barrie's drama and novel, now held by a London children's hospital, become public next year□giving added momentum to rumors that Hollywood director Steven Spielberg is planning a film version starring Michael Jackson. It all confirms Barrie's genius in finding a theme that has caught the imagination of four generations.

That theme is simple: growing up is not as wonderful as adults sometimes pretend. Peter Pan has seen the writing on the wall□the dull jobs and bored faces of so many grown-ups□and he wants no part of it. In the book version, his quixotic revolt is frequently overburdened by Barrie's ponderous commentary. But the play sticks economically to the story line, a virtue wonderfully enhanced by the Shaw's magnetic production. Its *Peter Pan* has more gusto than an old Errol Flynn adventure film.

It also has the nerve to look into the darker corners of Barrie's vision□his references to death and the sadness of growing old□from which more saccharine versions, from Broadway and Hollywood, have tiptoed away. Most important, this *Peter Pan* generates magic□the result of a successful melding of astounding technical effects and old-fashioned acting skill. Only the most thoroughgoing cynic would be bothered by a glimpse of the wires holding up Peter and his fellow fliers: this *Peter Pan* compels belief.

In the past the roles of Peter and his band of followers, the Lost Boys, have frequently been played by mature actresses. Other versions have featured children in those parts. But director Ian Judge has opted for an all-adult cast of both sexes, a tack that simultaneously ensures strong acting and infectious comedy. To watch Ted Dykstra as the toddler Michael Darling, hugging his Teddy Bear and moving about on all fours, is to be struck by both the latent infantilism of adults and the charm of children.

When Michael and his two siblings fly to Never-Never Land, where Wendy (Marti Maraden) is to take care of Peter's tribe of orphans, the audience gets its first glimpse of designer Cameron Porteous's wizardry. Not only do Peter (Tom McCamus) and the

Darling children levitate; their beds do too, turning into clouds as the miniature lamplit city of London revolves below.

The technical sleight of hand, however, never overwhelms Barrie's attempts to reveal the world of the imagination□Peter's kingdom. It is a place where evil men are more comic than dangerous. The Shaw's artistic director, Christopher Newton, returns to the stage as a deliciously frightening Captain Hook, swaggering, sulking and muttering dark piratical oaths ("Bicarbonate of soda!") with relish.

As the hero, McCamus is at once ethereal and boyish. He also has just the right touch of coldness. Peter, after all, is not human like the others. He can remain a child forever, but in his immortality he can never know what it is to have a fully human heart.

Source: John Bemrose, "The Peter Pan Principle" in *Maclean's,* Vol. 100, no. 35, August 31, 1987, p. 127.

Critical Essay #3

Phelan reviews a 1950 revival of Barrie 'splay, finding that the work holds the same appeal for him as an adult as it did when he first viewed it as a youngster. He offers a positive review of this production, praising the principle actors for their skill.

I would feel a good deal safer dealing with this review of the Barrie classic if I had managed to get a child to go with me. As a matter of fact I did vainly try to seize a child, with somewhat mixed results. My first (progressive) nephew had the chicken-pox, and the school in which my second (progressive) nephew abides, refused to release him in mid-week. Thirdly, the daughter of one of my best (Jungian) friends flatly refused to go, although her little brother, aged four, kept shouting into the telephone, "Peter Pain! Peter Pain! Me. Me." Needless to say, I gave up on that one.

The reason for all this benevolence was frankly in the interests of criticism as well as curiosity. Admitting, as I must, to a real nostalgia for Eva Le Gallienne's distinguished and absolute production of the play in the early thirties, it seemed to me I ought to temper possible prejudice with some outright junior reaction. Failing this conspiracy however, I might as well confess to having had a very good time at the present Lawrence-Stevens production. The business adds up, surprisingly, to fair Broadway. There is, in the person of Boris Karloff, the very best Captain Hook imaginable; there is, in Jean Arthur, an intriguing Peter; there is an enchanting Nana (you remember the sheepdog nurse) played by Norman Shelly; there is one excellent Ship set by Ralph Alswang; and there is music by Leonard Bernstein which is up-to-the-minute and sensitive, saving only those moments when he descends into radio solos with interpolated lyrics of his own. And finally there is, alas, our ridiculous system of rehearsal-time which literally forces a show as technically complicated as this one before the public before it can possibly be ready.

One can only suppose that Wendy Toye, the choreographer, must be even now delivering a few honest war-whoops to her Indians, and that she is also removing her Pirates from the chi-chi ballet class into some degree of grrr. Again, someone or other must be working to pull the grand final battle up into a real fight rather than a romp. But by far the most serious difficulty will be that the vaunted flying devices do not work invisibly, a circumstance which puts a grave kink in a good many of the lines of the play, not to say its point. All of the wires are visible against the backdrop and the costumers have not managed to conceal that lump between the shoulder blades of the air-borne children which makes them look like ill-managed puppets. I don't know how the wonderful Shultz Family got away with these impossibilities for Maud Adams and the other American productions, but certainly someone ought to find them and ask immediately. It's important. In a play that is all illusion, surely the illusion ought to be delivered; particularly a play for children. I daresay there will be some people who will be gratified that their offspring will not now be hurling themselves from the window on nothing but faith. But think of the questions these worthies are going to have to answer: why? why? why? Think of the explanations: it's a joke and yet not a joke; it's only a play; no, it isn't a lie.

I must say the parental tone of this account is tedious even to me. But I can't escape it now and it's good to be able to close on an encouraging note. Miss Arthur's job is a subtle achievement. Her Peter is certainly a boy: he is lithe, fresh, knobby, cropheaded, laughing, clever. And astonishingly enough, he is the opposite of romantic. The actress seems to rely on remoteness far more than the swaggering *bruhaha* that the part also provides. Somehow or other, she is playing it as *all Pan,* a true sprite, elusive as a snowflake. It is true she has no trouble vanquishing Mr. Karloff; we watch her doing it. But in the end, it seems to me it is Mr. Karloff, with his ruffles, his inky cloak, his rolling r's, his grand style, who really wins. I don't earnestly think anyone under ten is going to emerge from this version of Barrie wanting to wander off and be a Lost Boy. I think everyone is going to want to play Captain Hook from now on.

Source: Kappo Phelan, review of *Peter Pan* in *Commonweal,* Vol. LII, no. 5, May 12, 1950, pp. 127-28.

Robert Hatch

Hatch reviews a 1950 revival production of Peter Pan *for which new songs were composed by Leonard Bernstein. While finding the actors to be skillful, the production design imaginative, and Barrie's text to be as appealing as ever, the critic was less than pleased with the new musical numbers, finding their presence superfluous to the enjoyment of the tale.*

Considering the perishability of fantasy, the low esteem in which whimsy is now held and the knowing smiles of the recently analyzed, it must require a good deal of courage to offer *"Peter Pan"* today. Peter Lawrence and R. L. Stevens, producers of the current Jean Arthur-Boris Karloff revival, are suitably rewarded for their daring□they seem to have a hit on their hands.

But having taken the plunge with Barrie, it is too bad that the present backers then lost their nerve a bit and decided to help him along with a few ideas of their own. They engaged Leonard Bernstein to write "additional" lyrics and music, and hired a small male ballet troupe to fill out what they must have regarded as a thin evening. But the foxy Barrie needs no plumber's helpers, and *"Peter Pan"* is not thin; the additions merely slow up the action, clutter the stage with a number of unemployed merrymakers and from time to time overpower the innocence of the play with a "production number" vulgarity. Bernstein's contributions are the more unfortunate because they are the more obtrusive. His songs are not only unwanted; with one or two possible exceptions they are strikingly inferior. In particular, "Who Am I," inflicted on Wendy, who is otherwise touchingly played by Marcia Henderson, is a stale and cynical song-mill concoction. The settings, to get the rest of the trouble out of the way, are heavily jocose in the Disney toadstool manner and the mermaids are from Minsky.

Against these very real obstacles, Jean Arthur and Boris Karloff lead an admirable cast to triumphant success. It is astonishing that anyone today can be as beguiling a Peter

as Miss Arthur. She plays the part with wonderful taste, neither kidding the sentimentality being seduced by it. She is frankly boyish, embarrassed and unembarrassing, evidently enjoying herself enormously. I cannot make comparisons because. I did not see Maude Adams or even Marilyn Miller or Eva Le Gallienne in the role, but Miss Arthur is the right Peter for 1950. She lets Barrie the cuteness and confines herself to the matter-of-fact business of flying through space and conversing with fairies.

Karloff in the dual role of father and pirate builds his share of the evening almost to co-star stature. It is much too late discover that the dreadful Mr. Karloff is a fine comic, but his fastidiously bloodthirsty Captain Hook will be convincing proof for anyone who may have missed "Arsenic and Old Lace." The lost boys of The Never Land are an engaging sandlots group, Joe E. Marks is ridiculously sprightly as Smee, the timid pirate, and Norman Shelly produces an air of lunatic solicitude in Nana, the children's St. Bernard nurse. His crocodile is a little dispirited, but it is a thankless role.

Despite its age and despite the meddling of well-meaning friends, *"Peter Pan"* is as shrewd and winning entertainment as Broadway is apt to offer this year, but it would be bad luck to see it on a night when either Miss Arthur or Karloff missed the performance.

Source: Robert Hatch, "Barrie Wins Through" in the *New Republic,* Vol. 122, no. 19, May 8, 1950, pp. 20-21.

Adaptations

Peter Pan was adapted as a silent film in 1924. This version was released by Paramount and was directed by Herbert Brenon. It starred Betty Bronson as Peter Pan, Mary Brian as Wendy, and Virginia Brown Faire as Tinkerbell.

An full-length animated version was filmed in 1953. Released by Disney, it was directed by Clyde Geronimi and Wilfred Jackson. It featured the voices of Bobby Driscoll as Peter Pan, Kathryn Beaumont as Wendy, and Hans Conreid as both Captain Hook and Mr. Darling.

A live television version was performed on NBC in 1955, then done again live in 1956. Both versions featured Mary Martin as Peter Pan, Kathleen Nolan as Wendy, and Cyril Ritchard as Captain Hook.

A made-for-television adaptation was shown on NBC in 1976. It featured Mia Farrow as Peter Pan and Danny Kaye as Captain Hook.

An animated television series based on the stage play was shown in syndication in 1990. Known as *Peter Pan and the Pirates,* it featured the voice of Tim Curry as Captain Hook and Jason Mardsen as Peter Pan.

Topics for Further Study

Compare and contrast the standardized dramatic text of *Peter Pan* (1928) with any of the novelizations of the Peter Pan story that Barrie wrote. How do the demands of the different literary forms affect the basic plot?

Research societal attitudes towards women and motherhood in turn-of-the-century England. How do these attitudes compare with the depictions of women in *Peter Pan?*

The rights to *Peter Pan* have been owned by Disney for a number of years. Research how the character and the story have been modified, particularly in reference to Disney's immensely popular animated adaptation, since the debut of the stage play in 1904.

Compare and contrast the character of Wendy Darling in *Peter Pan* with Alice in Lewis Carroll' s children's fantasy book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* How are their experiences in a fantastic land similar? Different? How does the fact that these characters are female affect their fantastic experiences?

Compare and Contrast

1904: Child labor is common in both the United States and Great Britain but is a source of controversy. Legislation is proposed to regulate it, including laws that would require children to spend a certain amount of time in school.

Today: Child labor in American and England is highly restricted. Still, several American companies, including Nike, employ factories in developing countries to manufacture their goods at an extremely low cost. These factories often use child labor in sweatshop-like conditions.

1904: People flying in airplanes is an almost unheard-of concept. The Wright brothers made their first successful flight in 1903.

Today: Commercial air travel is common all over the world. Thousands of flights span the globe daily.

1904: Women comprise nearly one-third of the workforce in the United States. They are confined to certain jobs, mostly of a domestic nature, and receive low pay.

Today: Women comprise approximately half the workforce in the United States. While job opportunities are available in nearly every field, on average women make less than 80% of their male counterparts.

1904: Education has only recently been made compulsory in the United States and is still not required in Great Britain.

Today: Education, at least to age 16, is mandated by law in the United States and Great Britain.

What Do I Read Next?

Mary Rose is a play written by Barrie in 1920. It concerns a woman who has returned home after living among fairies.

Charlotte's Web, written by E. B. White in 1952, is a children's novel that also deals with motherhood (in this case a spider who nurtures a young pig) as well as the perils of maturity.

The Little White Bird; Or, Adventures in Kensington Gardens, a novel written by Barrie in 1902, is a precursor to the story of *Peter Pan.*

Androcles and the Lion, a 1913 play by George Bernard Shaw, is a children's farce that was written as a direct response to *Peter Pan.*

The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up (1983) is a nonfiction book by Dan Kileya. It is a psychological analysis of males in the United States.

Further Study

Barrie, James. *Margaret Ogilvy*, Scribner, 1896.

This is a biography Barrie wrote about his mother. It offers considerable insight into the playwright's psyche as well as the roots of his fascination with motherhood.

Birkin, Andrew. *J. M. Barrie and the Lost Boys: The Love Story That Gave Birth to Peter Pan,* Clarkson N. Potter, 1979.

This book details the complex relationship between Barrie and the Davies family. It features pictures, letters, and other primary source information.

Jack, R. D. S. "The Manuscript of*Peter Pan"* in *Children's Literature,* 1990.

This article discuses the original manuscript of *Peter Pan* and the evolution of the basic story.

Walbrook, H. M. *J. M. Barrie and the Theatre,* F. V. White & Co., 1922.

This book offers both analyses of Barrie's plays, including *Peter Pan,* and background information on Barrie and his work.

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Beerbohm, Max. "The Child Barrie" *in the Saturday Review,* January 7, 1905, pp. 13-14.

Green, Roger Lancelyn. *Fifty Years of Peter Pan,* Peter Davies, 1954, pp. 2, 155.

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Jack, R. D. S. *The Road to the Never Land: A Reassessment of J. M. Barrie's Dramatic Art,* Aberdeen University Press, pp. 167-68, 170.

Review of *Peter Pan in The Illustrated London News,* January 7, 1905.

Shout, John D. "From Nora Helmer to Wendy Darling: If You Believe in Heroines, Clap Your Hands" in *Modern Drama,* 1992, p. 360.

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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