

Sir James Matthew Barrie

J. M. Barrie was born May 9, 1860 in Kirriemuir, Scotland. Margaret Oglivy raised him in the midst of 10 other children, the mother he adored.

When Barrie was six, his older brother David (the mother's favorite) died and Barrie spent the rest of his childhood trying to replace his brother for his mourning mother. This attempt to replace a forever-young David would take its toll on the rest of Barrie's adult life and his writing. Barrie could be described as small and shy. As a man, he stood little more than five feet, was quiet and awkward around women.

Fortunately for Barrie, he was a success as a writer. He got his start as a writer for the Nottingham Journal after graduating from Edinburgh University. Before this time though, Barrie had already been captivated by the theater and after having short stories and several successful books published, Barrie finally wrote his first play--*Ibsen's Ghost* (1891). He followed this with *Walker, London*, during the production of which he met his future wife--the actress--Mary Ansell. The marriage was not a success, but in its duration Barrie wrote his most successful plays, including *The Little Minister* (1897), *The Admirable Crichton* (1902), and his most memorable work--*Peter Pan* (1904).

Barrie wrote *Peter Pan* as a tribute to the sons of his friends Sylvia and Arthur Llewelyn Davies. It was distinctly different from the previous, more mature material that Barrie had written and would write. *Peter Pan* was a fantasy, but not any mere fairy tale. Like Peter Pan himself, Barrie was a boy who refused to grow up. Barrie took such elements of life as his awkwardness with, yet dependence upon women, his love of children, and his own longing for childhood and shaped them into one of the best-loved stories of all time.

Peter Pan was Barrie's greatest success. In 1912, he turned it into a book, called "Peter and Wendy". However, after writing *Peter Pan*, he went on to write more plays. *What Every Woman Knows* (1906), *Dear Brutus* (1917), and *Mary Rose* (1920) were all very well received plays.

On a more personal note, Barrie's wife--Mary Ansell--divorced him in 1908. That same year, Arthur Llewelyn Davies died of cancer and in 1910 his wife Sylvia followed him, with the same disease. Barrie was left to take care of all five Davies boys, whom he treated like his own children. In later years, Barrie was made a baronet and received several honorary degrees on account of his literary figure. He died in 1937 after a long life.

Production History

Before it was a play, *Peter Pan* was a small story in a 1902 book by Barrie called *The Little White Bird*. The character of Peter from this novel was developed into the play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, in 1904. In 1906, the section of *The Little White Bird* that originated *Peter Pan* was published separately as a book called *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. Finally, Barrie turned his highly successful play into a novel called *Peter and Wendy* (1911).

The play *Peter Pan* started out as skits acted out for (and with) the sons of Sylvia and Arthur Llewelyn Davies, but turned into one of the most popular plays ever. Barrie wrote the full-length play in reaction to the Davies children's reaction to a pantomime play. Barrie figured it would be easy and profitable to write a similar play. However, Barrie's script was originally rejected because it was so elaborate. In 1904, plays generally did not involve flying and such frequent and major scene changes.

With the confidence of producer and friend, Charles Frohman, Barrie put *Peter Pan* into production. Actress Nina Boucicault originated the role of Peter. And as if having a 37-year-old woman play a one-day-old boy was not unusual enough, the production of *Peter Pan* did not follow a traditional path. Barrie gave minimal character notes to actors, as well as only a few pages of script at a time. He was a perfectionist as a director, often keeping cast and crew up to 15-18 hours at a time. Plus, the cast tended to find out about flying at the last minute.

Despite its hefty technical requirements, unusual rehearsal process and absurd, fantastical plot elements, *Peter Pan* was a success. It swept England and then the United States in 1905, with Maude Adams as the lead. Adams would go on to play the role of Peter Pan until 1915. Oddly enough however, in all the seasons that Maude Adams played the role, Barrie never got the opportunity to see her perform as Peter.

The role of Peter Pan went on to be played by grown women until the early 1980's--almost 70 years after its debut--but the memorable Peter Pans have always been women. Pauline Chase was Barrie's favorite. She played the role for nine straight seasons in London, from 1906-1914. Another actress who played Peter Pan for nine seasons in London was Jean Forbes-Robertson. She took the role 1927-1935, in addition to the 1938-1939 season. In London, the role would later be played by such actresses as Hayley Mills and Maggie Smith. On Broadway, *Peter Pan* has been played by Maude Adams (1905-1915), Marilyn Miller (1924-1925), Eva La Gallienne (1928-1933), Anne Edgar (1946), Jean Arthur (1950-1951), Mary Martin (1954), Sandy Duncan (1979-1980) and most recently Cathy Rigby (1990-1991). In addition, *Peter Pan* has been shown on television, been immortalized by Walt Disney as a cartoon film, and been made into two other movies: *Peter Pan* (1924) and *Hook* (1992).

What is the real meaning of peter pan?

In: [Drama and Acting](#), [Peter Pan](#) [[Edit categories](#)]

One View:

A common interpretation of Peter Pan is that he represents the Inner Child, the energetic, playful side of every human being, often forgotten or denied in the process of maturing.

Peter's ability to fly represents the whimsy of the human imagination, taking us to places far and near. Wendy, near the end of the tale, can no longer fly; Peter says that she is "too old"- that is, she's become too serious and "adult" and forgotten how to imagine and play.

Peter's tale reminds us to nurture our own Inner Child and that there is a place for play and whimsy in our lives even as adults- that we can grow older without "growing up."

Another view:

The real meaning of peter pan is having an out of body experience, thus flying. that is also why it is Neverland, because your spirit is eternal, never gets old. You also must be in a happy frame of mind to OOBE, thus think of a happy thought.

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