

Jack, R.D.S. *Myths and the Mythmaker: A Literary Account of J.M. Barrie's Formative Years*. Amsterdam – New York: Rodolfo, 2010; Muñoz Corcuera, Alfonso & Elis T. Di Biase (ed) *Barrie, Hook and Peter Pan: Studies in Contemporary Myth; Estudios sobre un mito contemporáneo* Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012; Bold, Valentina & Andrew Nash (ed) *Gateway to the Modern: Resituating J. M. Barrie* Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2014.

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It is strange, perhaps, and for Barrie scholars frustrating, that so long after Leonee Ormond's *J.M. Barrie* (1987) and R.D. S. Jack's *The Road to Neverland* (1991) there would still appear to be a need to vindicate the figure of J.M. Barrie as a major figure in Scottish and universal letters. Acknowledged in his day to be on a par with writers like Shaw and Hardy, Barrie's reputation has been vilified for many years, with even otherwise serious critics limiting their references to his work to biographical simplifications and pressing against the author the charge of thematic and artistic immaturity. The three volumes reviewed below share the desire to recover the figure of the author of *Quality Street* and revise the critical heritage his work has been subject to. While R.D.S. Jack closely examines the author's Victorian fiction as a means of justifying the importance of Barrie's reputation, the two collections of essays provide ample proof that the production of the writer from Kirriemuir still provides fertile ground for critics of diverse theoretical persuasions.

Jack's volume is, to some extent, a 'prequel' to his 1991 work. The author explicitly aims at repudiating some of the more simplistic and flippant claims directed towards Barrie who, he believes, has been well served by his biographers but not by his critics. He also detects an obsession in some critics with the Peter Pan works which are used to categorise Barrie as a "childish author", something which is particularly unfortunate bearing in mind the association the character of Peter Pan holds with the childlike and the rejection of maturity. This obsession has led some commenters to base their analyses solely on the works which conform to this stereotype of the childlike and immature. Biographical interpretations have done little to alleviate this problem, and the tragic death of Barrie's brother David in his

childhood and the playwright's difficult relationship with his mother have tended to lead to a plethora of Oedipal readings of Barrie's work which have the effect of obscuring other more salient aspects of his writing. Jack expresses a need to re-assess Barrie's early works as an anticipation of the great mature works and as such restore Barrie to the status of great and serious writer.

There exist numerous ironies surrounding the area between Barrie's critical reputation and his literary output. One of these is the fact that while biographers have found his Victorian years of great interest, critics have paid scarce attention to his works of this period. Jack offers a rigorous analysis of the early texts, from his first extended prose work *A Child of Nature* (1877) through the two versions of *The Little Minister* (prose 1891; drama 1897) to the Ibsenite drama *The Wedding Guest* (1900) and including his numerous collaborations and 'translations' as a means of gauging the extent to which these works bore the seed of the later mature dramas he produced from the first decade of the new century onwards. Another irony is that Scotland's greatest mythmaker has himself become a myth. Barrie's critical reputation has been tarnished by the suspicion of paedophilia or the belief that he is little more than a light, sentimental writer, a populist obsessed with his mother or a failed realist. Jack attempts to undo the damage done by such critical fallacies by outlining the intellectual category of Barrie whose studies at Edinburgh University brought him into contact with Professors such as David Masson, one of the greatest critics of the period, and the pioneer of psychology Alexander Campbell Fraser. Under Masson, Barrie studied classical rhetoric, and such was his development that he became an astute literary historian with an important number of critical texts to his name.

If it is ironic that Barrie, who made full use of the methodical and punctilious academic training he received at Edinburgh University, is treated so poorly in some critical writing on his work, it is no less ironic that the author, who attended one of the first psychology courses offered at a British university, should have been so sorely treated by psychologists, or more accurately, by amateurs offering an often quack-like pseudo-psychoanalytical analysis of the author's biography and applying this to his works. The Scottish novelist George Blake is one commenter who sees in the death of Barrie's brother David and his mother, Margaret Ogilvie's subsequent rejection of the

child James as being central to an understanding of Barrie. This comfortable analysis is repeated frequently in Barrie criticism, but is rejected by Jack as an oversimplification which has little bearing on the writer's actual literary output. Of over three hundred works written during the sentimental or 'Kailyard' period of his writing (1886-1896), only two of these deal with the death of his brother.

Jack also examines the transition of Barrie the novelist into Barrie the playwright. A particularly satisfying section of this volume is the detailed analysis of *The Little Minister* (1891) and its transformation into the play of the same name (1897). The novel, Jack claims, was Barrie's prose work which most successfully unites the poetic, the dramatic and the narrative, but its conversion into a play involved a process which both frustrated and depressed its author who subjected the work to numerous rewritings without ever feeling fully satisfied with the results.

After this perceived failure, Barrie seemed to feel the need to attempt to push his dramatic experimentation to new limits, and the quasi-realism of *The Wedding Guest* begins to show the allegorical range and depth which would later be fully mastered in the mature late plays which Jack likens to Shakespeare's late romances. The 'Tommy' novels are also studied in detail and given as evidence that here, at the end of his apprenticeship, Barrie is at last drawing together all the main themes and concerns, modes and tropes which will dominate his mature works.

Throughout the course of this book, R.D.S. Jack has subtly changed the question 'Is Barrie a complex, multi-layered writer?' to 'How did Barrie become a complex, multi-layered writer?' His study offers a hitherto inexistent analysis of Barrie's early work which, at the same time, opens up new possibilities regarding our reading and interpretation of the mature literary and dramatic production of the author.

Muñoz Corcuera and Di Biase's volume is focussed on the 'powerful icon' that is the figure of Peter Pan. Celebrating, they state, the centenary of what they call the final form of the character as presented in *Peter and Wendy* (1911), the editors seek to explore the obsessive re-writing of the Peter Pan myth by Barrie himself, but

also in the wider world of artistic and popular culture production which has found in the myth a rich source of material.

Like R.D.S. Jack, the editors here regret the oblivion to which Barrie and his work appear to have been condemned, while acknowledging the inroads made since the mid-1980s. The aim once again, therefore, is to vindicate the abiding relevance of the figure of Barrie, as well as providing a worthy celebration of the centenary of *Peter and Wendy* by ‘opening a space for the deepening of the figure of Peter Pan in its triple status as myth, twentieth-century cultural icon and literary character’ (xiii). The volume is divided into six sections containing a variety of essays which range from literary theory and psychoanalysis to postcolonial and comparative literature and the field of pedagogy. These essays are written in two languages – English (nine contributions) and Spanish (eight), each of which is introduced by a brief abstract in both languages. The decision to use two languages is justified by the editors but scholars who lack one of the languages might face a degree of frustration at not being able to access the edition in its entirety.

The first section contains two essays which deal with the creation of the myth in the London of Barrie. R.D.S. Jack, in a fine contribution, claims the Peter Pan is the Scottish writer’s ‘most ambitious and fertile theme so far’ in which he produces what Jack considers to be ‘the most open-ended of dramatic texts’ (22). Once again, Jack reclaims Barrie’s position as an important, relevant, intellectual and – above all, perhaps, modern writer whose fusion of children’s pantomime with Darwinian concepts of procreation and evolution. Céline Albin-Faivre examines the question of memory as the only true indicator of reality. Barrie, she argues, was denied the memory of his mother’s face (following the death of his brother she found herself unable to look at James) and as such the writer suffered a form of childhood amnesia. As such in Barrie’s life reality was replaced by a series of fictions. Using the theoretical indications of Abraham and Torok, one of these fictions, Peter Pan, the character, is seen as a phantom, ‘a prisoner of oblivion – a sort of black hole’ (35).

The following section is subtitled ‘The Shadow’ and consists of three pieces devoted to the character of Peter Pan. In the first of these María González de Ozaeta

presents a comparative study between *Peter and Wendy* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). In both works, she claims, we are introduced to the presence of an archetype of the god Pan. Basing her theory on the works of Jung, the author ably argues that both novels share communities of 'lost children' which copy the modes and systems of 'real society'. The main difference for González de Ozaeta is that while Barrie's children are really lost, in *Lord of the Flies* it is childhood itself which is lost. The children in *Peter and Wendy* lose themselves deliberately as a strategy to avoid the possibility of losing their childhood. David Rudd offers an alternative to the multiple Oedipal readings of Barrie's work in general and the Peter Pan oeuvre in particular. For Rudd, an Oedipal reading is in itself inadequate as a means of reading the works. The text, he shows, does not follow the outline of an Oedipal plot and the use of Lacanian concepts allows the author to place Peter Pan as a 'sublime object' – an anomalous impossibility positioned without the laws of reality. Alfonso Muñoz Corcuera looks at the symbolic and psychological richness of the character of Captain Hook in a work which he argues is in fact a game of doubles in which Peter Pan is a double of Captain Hook who in turn is a double of J.M. Barrie himself.

The third section, 'Neverland', aims to concentrate on the purely textual and intertextual dimensions of Barrie's literary production. Elisa T. Di Biase studies the fictional relationship between the character Peter Pan and the mermaids. In *Peter and Wendy*, Peter is the only character who is capable of approaching the mermaids. In fact, Di Biase suggests, there is much in common between Peter and the sirens, with sexual seduction being an important part of Peter's make up just as it is for the mermaids. While the latter are 'femme fatales', Peter Pan is himself an 'enfant fatal'. Fabio L. Vericat's essay examines the narrative strategies which Barrie employs in his work in order to blur the distinctions between novel and play and as such give rise to the literary hybridity so central to his writing. Patricia Lucas analyses the visual representations of Peter Pan as a means of investigating the symbolic spaces found in the work. The depiction of the clothes of the characters and the manipulation of spaces, geography and architecture form part of the richness of the works in which the air in which Peter moves is contrasted to the earthly dimension of Wendy, the Darling's house to the island and the world of children to that of adults.

‘The Lost Boys’, the fourth section, centres on the social and cultural implications of the Peter Pan myth. Pradeep Sharma sees Peter Pan as being the creation of an imperialistic mind-set. J.M. Barrie, he claims has reinterpreted the colonial dream in his work having ‘successfully created a land of desire, a land to be appropriated, engaged and controlled, to visit for a while but not to stay there’ (149). Jaime Cuenca looks at the incarnation of Peter Pan as the ideal of eternal youth, an ideal which in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been commercialised to an extreme extent. The article also observes the relationship between Peter and Hook within terms of generational conflict. Esther Charabati suggests the use of Peter Pan as a teaching tool with which children can be allowed to see Peter’s flaws – his selfishness, his vanity, his unaccountability – as characteristics in a world of fiction which reproduces the conditions of the real world. Paige Gray concentrates on *Peter and Wendy* and on Stephen Spielberg’s screen adaptation of the Peter Pan myth, *Hook* (1991) and addresses the difficulties of assuming adulthood and how these are reflected in pre-adolescent girls and the eating disorders they often suffer. The poignant scene in which Peter visits Wendy at the window of the Darling house to discover that she has grown echoes brilliantly the tragedy of growing up, converting Peter Pan into a symbol for youth.

The fifth section, ‘The Pirate Ship’, reviews approaches to Peter Pan in other literary and artistic works. Silvia Herreros de Tejada suggests that the nature of Peter Pan as character is, in fact, highly paradoxical in that, while the character is seen as being an eternal child, he really, in his journey through numerous texts, genres and media, grows and experiences all the different stages of life. John Keith L. Scott examines the relationship between Barrie’s work and Alan Moore and Melinda Gebbie’s comic book *Lost Girls*. Moore and Gebbie transform Peter and Wendy, just as Barrie himself had transformed them, as a means of creating their own fictional world in the way. Fernando Ángel Moreno and Eliana Dukelsky argue that Peter Pan is perhaps the most postmodern of western literary myths. The authors use the theories of Eugenio Trías to deconstruct the mythical of Loisel’s *Peter Pan*, which they claim to be the best comic book based on Barrie’s characters, and Daniel Mares’ novel 6.

The final section, 'Skull Rock', presents two essays concerned with film versions of Barrie's work or which deal with the life of the author. Cristina Manzano Espinosa looks at films which deal with Barrie's texts and his biography, especially Jaime Chávarri's *El río de oro* (1986), Spielberg's *Hook* (1991) and Foster's *Finding Neverland* (2004). Of particular interest, perhaps, is Manzano Espinosa's vindication of Chávarri's film, almost ignored in the Spanish-speaking world and with little projection outside this world, but a fine work in which the central character, Uncle Peter, represents not just Peter but also Barrie and Hook. Auba Llompart Pons ventures to comment on the relationship between Peter Pan and horror movies. Through examples from films such as *The Omen* (1976) and *The Orphanage* (2007) she argues that the child who never grows older has been transformed into a 'child as monster' paradigm in which the child becomes a figure of terror and lost innocence is converted into malicious evil.

Valentina Bold and Andrew Nash's *Gateway to the Modern* has, as its subtitle, *Resituating J.M. Barrie*. Like Jack, and like Muñoz Corcuera & Di Biase, the editors explicitly recognise the need to resituate the Kirriemuir-born writer in the world of English-language letters. Barrie is 'a writer of elusive depths and complexity' (vii) who has been only partially recovered by an academia which still has not completely accepted him as the great writer he is. Their volume, a celebration of the sheer variety of Barrie's literary output, is divided into three parts which deal respectively with Barrie as dramatist, Barrie's prose and neglected aspects of Peter Pan.

Jan McDonald looks at Barrie in relation to his contemporary dramatists and the theatrical controversies in which he was involved. After looking at the portrayal of the New Woman, the suffragette and the 'woman question' in his plays, McDonald contends that Barrie was much less optimistic than contemporaries such as Shaw, Galsworthy and Granville Barker. The author also details Barrie's little-known work on the Committee for the Abolition of the Office of Dramatic Censorship. Even though he himself was not affected by censorship, he led a deputation to the Home Secretary, an event which the playwright would turn into parody. Anna Farkas sees Barrie as a modern playwright who, as Shaw himself acknowledged, deconstructed the sexual problem play with its formulaic plot, and rejecting the backbone of a large

part of the Victorian dramatic tradition. In particular Farkas praises Barrie for preparing the stage, as it were, for a new type of heroine beyond the traditional stereotypes of fallen woman and desirable virgin. No volume on Barrie would be complete without an article by the most prestigious expert on his work, and R.D.S. Jack's contribution to this volume looks at Barrie's later dramas from the same viewpoint with which, in *Myths and the Mythmaker* he scrutinises the early Victorian works. Again Jack makes use of the intellectual development Barrie underwent while studying at Edinburgh University and the influence of Professor David Masson on the Angus writer's later 'Shakespearean Romances' such as *Quality Street* or *Peter Pan*. Jonathan Murray examines the relationship between Barrie and the cinema, ranging from the writer's acquaintance with D.W. Griffith to the attraction the seventh art has always felt to Barrie and his work.

The section devoted to Barrie's prose opens with an article by Douglas Gifford which places the writer firmly within the Scottish literary tradition. His analysis of *Farewell Miss Julie Logan* (1931) which he sees as 'a wonderful example of the classic Scottish supernatural tale' (68) which 'slyly' revisits the territory of *The Little Minister* (1891) with a much more subtle reflection on the nature of innocence and evil. Hugh MacDiarmid and J.M. Barrie would seem to be antithetical figures in Scottish letters. The former's criticism of the Kailyard is well known, but Margery Palmer McCulloch suggests that his attitude to Barrie was at worst ambivalent, at best supportive. Although MacDiarmid is unlikely to have shown much enthusiasm for Barrie's prose fiction of the 1890s, he did recognise his skill with the spoken word, indicating on more than one occasion that Barrie was Scotland's greatest dramatist since Sir David Lindsay. Andrew Nash discusses the seemingly unlikely links between Barrie and D.H. Lawrence, or between Barrie and modern Scottish writers such as Alasdair Gray or James Kelman. Although admitting that the connection with Kelman may seem fanciful, Nash suggests that the 'sentimacbloodymental' problem of the Scottish psyche is as present in the character of Patrick Doyle from *A Disaffection* (1989) as it is in the character of Tommy in Barrie's *Sentimental Tommy* (1896).

The final section of the volume contains four essays on neglected aspects of the Peter Pan myth. Paul Fox focusses on *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906) and discusses the importance of ‘mapping’ in Barrie’s work. He looks at the performance aesthetic in Decadent literature with reference to John Davidson’s poem ‘Twenty Bob a Week’ (1894) and the ‘liminal character of the consummate artist, Peter Pan’ (132). Ralph Jessop’s contribution sees Peter Pan as a modernist text which uses oppositional discourse as a response to Victorian pessimism in a world in which wonder, uncertainty and place play a role in opposing ‘the terrifying bleakness of the modern world’ (152). Rosemary Ashton studies Barrie’s relationship to the district of Bloomsbury, a forgotten setting which is as important as Kensington Gardens and which appears in the writer’s stage directions and which was a place apparently of great significance to the writer.

The final two contributions perhaps do justice to Barrie in that they present the reactions to his work as expressed by children. Valentina Bold examines the often moving letters sent by children to ‘Wendy’ and the actress who originally portrayed the character, Hilda Trevelyan. These letters, written between 1906 and 1918, offer a wide range of responses to the work and allow the contemporary adult reader to understand part of the magic the characters created and developed by Barrie held for children. A magic which, has not died with time. The enduring nature of the Peter Pan myth is amply demonstrated in the contribution of Hugh McMillan, which gathers four poems written by present-day pupils at Barrie’s old school, Dumfries Academy. These poems pay touching tribute to the author’s relevance in the contemporary world.

The publication of these three works within such a short period of time must at last put paid to the unfair reputation under which J.M. Barrie has lived for so long. The sheer scope and depth of Barrie studies revealed in these volumes would seem to suggest that Barrie scholarship is currently at an important stage in its development. While there are still areas in which Barrie deserves wider recognition it is gratifying to see that a writer of the stature of Barrie is no longer regarded simply as a dinosaur of the ‘Kailyard’ school or the creator of a Disney character.