Peter Pan
or the Boy who Wouldn't Grow up

A tale by James M. BARRIE
Here is the first sentence we can read when we open “Peter Pan”, a rewriting version of the eponymous play by James M. Barrie, published in 1911. Of course, when we hold this novel in our hands, we know before even read it that it talks about adventure, evil pirates, fairies, dreamed island and so on… but actually, “Peter Pan” is above all a reflection about childhood, passing of time, and more specifically, about the fact of growing up and becoming, an adult. For some characters, it is a natural and necessary transition, for others, a tragedy. Thus, James Barrie reveals us the ambiguities regarding those questions which seem haunting children and grown-ups; besides he show us the hidden face of kids. Actually, “Peter pan” is the story of a boy who wanted to play forever an everlasting game; but games have consequences too and dreams can slowly turn into nightmares.

Summery:
London, probably at the dawn of the 20th century. Wendy Darling, a young lady who has to grow up, is involved in a fantastic adventure the night where Peter Pan brings her and her two brothers, Michael and John, to Neverland, an oneiric island made of children’s daydreams. There, Wendy become the mother of the Lost Boys, the prisoner of the awful Captain Hook and his pirate crew, the target of Tinker Bell’s jealousy… So many things which are going to push Wendy to grow up, even though no one is allowed to in Neverland.
There are six Lost Boys in the story: Tootles, the Twins, Slightly, Curly and Nibs. They all felt from their pram when they were babies, that is why they were sent to Neverland. They are ruled by Peter and are his playmates. As him, Lost Boys enjoy defying Pirates and Captain Hook. They never have to grow up otherwise they are excluded from Neverland or slain by Peter himself.

Peter Pan is a ambiguous and troubling character: playful, crafty as well as authoritarian, capricious, stubborn, selfish and even cruel. He’s the ‘father’ of the Lost Boys and led them to many adventures. Peter is absolutely terrified at the idea of growing up someday; so he prefers living totally unconcerned by reality, in Neverland. Legends told that he guides children’s soul to «the other side» when they pass away. He spent his time playing and defying Captain Hook, symbol of adults’ authority.

Wendy Darling is the heroine of this story. She is kind, sweet and seems to be the perfect mother for the Lost Boys. She knows a lot of stories about Peter Pan that she told to her brothers. Nevertheless, her parent, and especially her father, expect her to behave like an adult and grow up. Therefore, Wendy decides to escape away with Peter, Michael and John, and leave her parents to live adventures.

Tinker Bell is Peter’s companion but also a fairy. She has equivocal feelings for Peter and is mad in jealousy concerning Wendy. Tinker Bell is totally impulsive and emotive, therefore she listens her feelings before her reason, what is pushing her to act excessively. Tinker Bell plays many part in the book: a traitor, a victim, a martyr, for instance. Thus, she’s an intriguing character.
Captain Hook is at the head of the “Jolly Roger”, a pirate ship. Just as Peter Pan, he’s extremely ambivalent: even if he’s a sophisticated man, he restlessly tracks Peter and the Lost Boys. Despite of his severity and his taught attitudes, Hook is absolutely frighten by death and passing of time; that’s why is obsessed by the “Tic Tac” made by the crocodile which hunts him night and day. By the way, he has already lost his right hand because of that beast. His most loyal companion is Mr. Smee.

Mrs. Darling is Wendy’s, John’s and Michael’s mother. She is extremely lovely and sweet unlike Mr. Darling who is more severe and pragmatic. Mrs Darling embodies an adult who still conserves a child heart and believe in Peter Pan. In a way, she is the perfect mother which Wendy tries to look like. She is the most rassurent character in the book, I guess.

Michael & John Darling are Wendy’s younger brothers. They follow Peter and their sister in Neverland and become a kind of Lost Boys too. They don’t play a very important part in the novel but they are other playmates for Peter and the Boys.

Captain Hook

Tiger Lily is the daughter of the Redskin clan’s chef. She is caught by Hook who expects trap Peter Pan. She’ll be save by the young boy.
However, Peter Pan can’t be considered as an hero or an example neither: As it said several times in the book, Peter is “gay and innocent and heartless”. Nothing to do with the naive and friendly character arranged by the Disney Studios! Totally closed on himself and egocentric, the boy doesn’t even notice that Wendy became an adult at the end; even worse, each time he comes back to the real world, he brings Wendy’s descendants to Neverland, thinking they are Wendy! Therefore, the game he likes to play never ends.

Actually, Captain Hook isn’t the only monster in this story; indeed, Peter and him are not as different as we could expect to. They’re both afraid of passing of time and death, they’re both cold and cruel and they reciprocally need each other to make sense in their lives in Neverland.

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Of curse it is! Actually, James Barry is not really optimistic about people who decide to grow up. At the very end of the book, Wendy, John, Michael and the Lost Boy leave Neverland to come back to the actual world. We could think it’s an happy ending but not at all: the Boys grow up, have to work and live in a monotonous routine, without “any story to tell their children”, and so are John and Michael. Indeed, becoming an adult is a kind of tragedy, the end of a miracle. James Barry himself writes : “You see children know such a lot now, they soon don’t believe in fairies, and every time a child says, ‘I don’t believe in fairies,’ there is a fairy somewhere that falls down dead.”
1- “Peter Pan” still be a classic of British literature and also one of the most famous modern fairy tales ever!

2- Disney is beautiful, magical and so on... but IT’S NOT A LITERARY REFERENCE! Everything is not as pretty and naive as it seems. Read the book to make your own idea of this witty and reflectional tale.

3- Even though you don’t like novels, you can read the dramatic version. The play might be shorter to read and it can make you discover another literary genre.

4- James M. Barrie style’s is pretty clear, poetic, not really difficult and pleasant to read. It could be a great choice to make those who doubt of their english reading level more confident.

5- This book is absolutely breathtaking and if you give it a chance, it would probably blow your mind! There is no age to read it and whether you think you’ve still got a child heart, “Peter Pan” is made for you. Moreover, we don’t need pretentious or ‘serious’ books to make us wiser; tales can too.
“All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust.”

“And thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless.”

“Second star to the right and straight on 'til morning.”
“You see, Wendy, when the first baby laughed for the first time, its laugh broke into a thousand pieces, and they all went skipping about, and that was the beginning of fairies.”

“Never say goodbye, because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting.”

“Fairies have to be one thing or the other, because being so small they unfortunately have room for one feeling only.”
“Stars are beautiful, but they may not take an active part in anything, they must just look on forever. It is a punishment put on them for something they did so long ago that no star now knows what it was. So the older ones have become glassy-eyed and seldom speak (winking is the star language), but the little ones still wonder.”