

# Childhood as a time of complete horror in james barrie's dystopia peter pan

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## **Childhood as Utter Horror in James Barrie's Dystopia: Peter Pan**

Throughout their youth, children are almost always under the impression that those closest to them have a child's best interest at heart. Furthermore, children are undoubtedly the most trusting of all creatures in the human race; their hearts and intentions are still pure until gruesomely tainted with manipulation and seduction by their elders. A child's innocence is something so precious that it creates jealousy in those that crave that innocence. In James Barrie's dystopia Peter Pan, childhood is portrayed as a time of complete and utter horror because the Darling children are manipulated by those closest to them, because the youth of the Darling children is torn away from them, and because life as the Darling children know it becomes completely deconstructed upon discovering Nerverland.

In Barrie's Peter Pan, the Darling children are manipulated by their parents as well as by Peter Pan. Throughout the novel, Wendy, Michael, and John Darling had put complete trust in their parents. In fact, the children trusted their parents so much that they believed everything their parents said to be genuine. However, Mr. and Mrs. Darling chose to put all of their children into the nursery, which was on the top, secluded floor of their home, with no more than Nana the nanny-dog to look over their children. Furthermore, the night that the Darling children are taken away by Peter Pan, Michael Darling sleepily asks his mother, "Can anything harm us, mother, after the night lights are lit?" To which Mrs. Darling responds, "Nothing precious, they are the eyes a mother leaves behind to guard her children (Barrie 21)." In this correspondence with her son, Mrs. Darling gives a false sense of safety to <https://assignbuster.com/childhood-as-a-time-of-complete-horror-in-james-barries-dystopia-peter-pan/>

her son, knowing that there was merely a nanny-dog to watch over the children. Coming up with this reasoning behind having night lights in the nursery, and manipulating her children to believe this reasoning makes Mrs. Darling feel better about constantly leaving her children alone. Also, the Darling children are manipulated by Peter Pan himself. As Wendy Darling asks Peter where Neverland<sup>5</sup> is he tells her, “ Second star to the right and straight on ‘ till morning.’ That, Peter told Wendy was the way to Neverland; but even birds, carrying maps and consulting them at windy corners, could not have sighted it with these instructions. Peter, you see, said anything that came to his head (Jessica n. p.).” Peter Pan did not want anyone to know more than he did, and he also did not want anyone to grow up; he was stuck this way, and he wanted to ensure that everyone else around him remained young as well. Another example of Peter manipulating the Darling children would be when he is attempting to coerce them into leaving the nursery to fly with him towards Neverland. Wendy begs Peter not to leave the nursery to go back to Neverland, and he can see that she is desperate. Peter takes advantage of the way Wendy feels about him, and Wendy’s maternal instincts. “ He came back, and there was a greedy look in his eyes now which ought to have alarmed her, but did not. ‘ Oh, the stories I could tell the lost boys!’ she cried, and then Peter gripped her and began to draw her toward the window (Barrie 33).” Peter knew quite positively that Wendy couldn’t resist the idea of taking care of the Lost Boys; he manipulated her into feeling as though she had to be their mother-surrogate. In fact, Peter Pan was constantly a negative and controlling character: “ It is humiliating to have to confess that this conceit of Peter was one of the most fascinating

qualities. To put it with brutal frankness, there was never a cockier boy (Barrie 26).” Peter took advantage of the way others perceived him, and played this to his strengths. So, the Darling children were constantly being used, and manipulated by the people in their lives that they placed the most trust in.

The youth of the Darling children was stolen away from them by being sexualized, and in turn, forced to grow up. Peter Pan seduced the children, and enchanted them into leaving the nursery that night. Peter was constantly trying to keep children naïve, and altered to his liking. However, by doing this, Peter only seemed to push children farther and farther towards the path of adulthood. When the lost boys began to grow up, Peter tried to kill them, and one is sure after reading Barrie’s novel that he would do the same to anyone else who stood in his way when it came to not allowing children to grow up.

Lastly, the lives of the Darling children become completely deconstructed after they find Neverland. For example, the children soon learn that nothing is as it seems. Neverland is worse than the real world; in Neverland there is real death, no protection whatsoever, dangerous situations, and children actually grow up faster there. The Darling children learned that being in Neverland isn’t all that Peter Pan cracked it up to be – they grow up faster being there. Jacques Derrida once said that “ deconstruction in literature is parasitic. It distorts already existing narratives, and reveals dualistic ideals. In deconstructive literature, there are internal problems that actually point towards alternative meanings (Reynolds n. p.).” This explains that the

dualistic view Peter Pan creates of Neverland is nothing more than a parasitic idea in order to control and manipulate the children that he envies; Peter cannot grow up, and although he claims to prefer it this way, he will forever wish that he was simply a normal boy.

So, throughout their youth, children are almost always under the impression that those closest to them have a child's best interest at heart. A child's innocence is something so precious that it creates jealousy in those that crave that innocence. In James Barrie's dystopia Peter Pan, everything is not as it truly seems, and in the end, the Darling children come to the bittersweet conclusion that Neverland is not what they had hoped, and in turn, the Darling children grow up.