



# THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE SATURDAY, JUNE 4, 2005  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL CONFERENCE WILL  
FEATURE A BOUNTY OF SCHOLARSHIP ON *PETER PAN*

WINNIPEG—**From June 9 - 12, 2005**, scholars from around the globe will converge in Winnipeg at the Children's Literature Association annual conference to share their research, discuss current issues in children's literature, and to celebrate the accomplishments of their peers. Over 200 delegates and speakers from more than 10 countries, including Australia, South Africa, Greece, and India will be in attendance.

This year's conference will feature a number of presenters on J.M. Barrie's children's classic *Peter Pan*. The story was originally published as *Peter and Wendy* in 1911, but now is almost always published under the title *Peter Pan*. Jill May, of Purdue University, suggests that there are several reasons for the plethora of presenters on *Peter Pan*.

She argues that two of the reasons are that the "ChLA has sponsored an essay collection on the book, and the session [she is] in is a result of that work." Secondly, there is a publication anniversary date for *Peter Pan* that coincides with the conference this year. Also, at the founding of the ChLA, *Peter Pan* was named a "Touchstone" text. This distinction signifies that founders of the ChLA felt that *Peter Pan* was important enough that every scholar of children's literature ought to know it.

The story of *Peter Pan* appears to have a special place not just for scholars of children's literature and culture, but in American popular culture as well. May argues that the play version of *Peter Pan* "is continually produced in elementary and high schools, summer stock, etc [in America]." The constant production of the play helps to keep it in the minds of Americans. May notes that "there are spin-off movies that keep it in the family market. Plus there is Disney, and bookstores like Borders, etc., who keep it in the eye of parents."

The character Peter Pan first appears in the adult text *The Little White Bird* (1902). Scholars like Jacqueline Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, have worked with how the story of *Peter Pan*, in all three of its manifestations, has been a challenge of the very idea that there is a genre of children's fiction at all. This is an area that the University of Winnipeg's own Perry Nodelman has been exploring for years with several different texts.

Another part of the scholastic interest in this story has been the ostensible link between the personal life of J. M. Barrie and the narrator of the story. For example, some scholars think that the name *Peter Pan* comes from the Greek god Pan and a child who was raised by Barrie, Peter Llewelyn-Davies. This apparent link has caused scholars to ponder the possible pedophilic longing presented in the stories about *Peter Pan*.

In current popular culture, the possible pedophilic sexual desire present in *Peter Pan*, and the idealized childhood depicted in *Peter Pan*, has created an interest in looking at Michael Jackson and his “Neverland” ranch. The idea of the “boy who will never grow up” has led scholars to wonder why childhood is seen as such an ideal time in life.

-30-

To learn more about the conference or to register, visit  
<http://chla.uwinnipeg.ca/conference.cfm> or contact:

Mavis Reimer, Conference Chair  
phone: 204.786.9185  
m.reimer@uwinnipeg.ca

or Ben MacPhee-Sigurdson  
phone: 204.786.9351  
chla@uwinnipeg.ca