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**EXTENDED ESSAY**

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**Research Question:** The comparative analysis of “Peter and Wendy” by J.M. Barrie and “Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone” by J.K. Rowling based on common themes and their influence on the plot, setting and characters with regard to the differentiation of the structure of the society between the dates of publication of the novels.

**Abstract**

J.M. Barrie and J.K. Rowling are of the best-known authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with their twisting plots and epic characters, when it comes to children's literature. Although their books *Peter Pan and Wendy* (1911) and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997) are considered to be children's classics, there are not many investigations on the importance of the themes of the novels. This essay investigates the influence of the common themes of the novels on the plot, setting and characters with regard to the change in the societal structure between the publication dates of the books.

Barrie and Rowling both explore the themes of gender roles, childhood, fantasy and the battle between the good and the evil in their novels. However, the interpretation of two themes, gender roles and childhood, demonstrates disparity due to the differentiation of the societal structure between the dates of publication of the novels since both authors depict their societies' current views in their books. The different exploration of the themes of gender roles and childhood affects the portrayals of the novel characters, especially the protagonists; Peter and Harry, and the primary female characters; Wendy and Hermione. The themes of fantasy and the battle between the good and the evil, on the other hand, are reflected similarly, thus, allowing the authors to create magical settings and intriguing plots that catch the attention of children. Overall, it is observed that both Barrie and Rowling skilfully entwine the themes with the structure of their novels.

(248 Words)

*All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms  
nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it.*

(Rowling 70)

*Second to the right and straight on till morning*

(Barrie 40)

## CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	Introduction	5
<b>2.</b>	Common Themes	7
	<b>2.1.</b> Gender Roles	7
	<b>2.2.</b> Childhood	9
	<b>2.3.</b> Fantasy	12
	<b>2.4.</b> The Good vs. The Evil	15
<b>3.</b>	Conclusion	17
	Bibliography	19

## 1. Introduction

According to author Orson Scott Card, “One can make a good case for the idea that children are often the guardians of the truly great literature of the world, for in their love of story and unconcern for stylistic fads and literary tricks, children unerringly gravitate toward truth and power” (“Children’s Literature”). Children’s literature is a literary genre that consists of books written for children and books that are chosen by children. The books written for children are intentionally aimed at young people, while the books chosen by children consist of books that were originally aimed at a different audience but eventually have become the favourites of children. For example, *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, which is considered to be a classical children’s book today, was originally intended for adults. The distinction of the characteristics between books written for children and books chosen by children beclouds the literary definition of the genre.

J. M. Barrie is one of the best-known authors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it comes to his works for children. Published in 1911, *Peter Pan and Wendy*, which is the novelisation of Barrie’s play *Peter Pan; or, The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up*, is regarded as one of the masterpieces of children’s literature under the group of books that are written for children. The protagonist of the novel, Peter Pan has become an icon for the rebellious youth with his refusal of growing up while the setting of the novel, Neverland, has always been considered as the island of childhood and escapism.

J.K. Rowling, on the other hand, is another author that is widely recognized for her works for children during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first book of her “Harry Potter” series, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* published in 1997, not only made critical and financial acclaim, but also created a new brave hero for the youth: Harry Potter. Rowling’s humour, imagination, direct style and intriguing plot along with Hogwarts School of

Witchcraft and Wizardry created a cultural phenomenon influencing the children around the globe.

The importance of *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* on children's literature should never be underestimated since both novels have created child icons and have opened the gates of imagination for children. However, although the literary genres of the novels are the same, the explorations of some of the common themes are very different due to the differentiation of the societal norms between the dates of publication of the books. Since many literary elements, including the characters, setting and the plot, are based on those common themes, it is possible to say that the differentiation of the structure of the society also affects the structure of the novels. The scope of this study, therefore, will be the comparative analysis of *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* -two novels belonging to books written for children in the 20<sup>th</sup> century- based on common themes and their influence on the plot, setting and characters, with regard to the differentiation of the structure of the society between the dates of publication of the novels.

## 2. Common Themes

The themes of the novels play an important role in the structure of the novels and their significance in literature since those themes are specifically aimed at children. Thus, the openness of the minds of children stresses out the importance of the themes that will be grafted to the audience. *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* are novels that share common literary themes. However, the content of some common themes along with their exploration demonstrates disparity due to the differentiation of the societal norms between the publication years of the novels. This differentiation plays an important role in both books since the themes also form the plot and setting of the novels as well as affecting the portrayal of characters.

### 2.1. Gender Roles

Gender roles is one of the themes that are analysed in both novels. The depiction of gender roles as a theme is an important aspect, since this particular theme affects the portrayals of the female characters.

Both authors present the female characters of the novels and their gender roles according to the current structure of their society. Barrie's novel *Peter Pan and Wendy* explores gender roles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1911) on the character of Wendy, while Rowling explores gender roles of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (1997) on the character of Hermione.

In *Peter Pan and Wendy*, the gender roles are reflected specifically on the concept of motherhood. The primary female character of the novel, Wendy, a 13-year-old girl from London, is portrayed as being domestic and susceptible to motherhood and thus, she is not the

social equal of Peter since her place is home and her role is being the “mother”. However, Peter refuses playing the “father”. Peter’s tricking of Wendy for taking her to the island depicts the domestic nature of Wendy:

‘Wendy,’ he said, the sly one, ‘You could tuck us in at night.

‘Oo!’

‘None of us has ever been tucked in at night’

‘Oo,’ and her arms went out to him.

‘And you can darn our clothes and make pockets for us’...

How could she resist? ‘Of course it’s awfully fascinating!’ she cried (Barrie 35).

Hermione, the 11-year-old primary female character of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, on the other hand, portrays a dominant, independent and overachiever girl that is socially equal to the male characters of the novel. Hermione is also depicted as an overly-hardworking character that sometimes annoys her friends with her wits: “You’re saying it wrong ... It is Win-gar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the ‘gar’ nice and long” (Rowling 127). In an interview Rowling states “My feminist conscience is saved by Hermione, who’s the brightest character” (“Books that Made a Difference”).

The differentiation of the societal norms between 1911 and 1997 explains the contrasts between the characteristics of Wendy and Hermione. In 1911s England, “many of the opponents of the women’s suffrage believed that men and women belonged to different ‘spheres’. The men’s sphere was politics, government, work, war, trade and business. The role of the woman was as wife and mother and in running home.” (“Early 1900 Women’s Suffrage”) However, during the gap between the publication dates of the novels, women not only gained the right to vote, but also became active and equal participants of the social and economic life.

The use of motherhood as a motif in *Peter Pan and Wendy* and gender equality as a motif in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* demonstrates that Barrie and Rowling reflect their societies' views while exploring the theme of gender roles. Therefore, it is possible to say that the major change on the status of women between the publication dates of the books is responsible for the different portrayals of the female characters.

## **2.2. Childhood**

Another theme that is examined in the novels is the theme of childhood. The theme of childhood is very prominent in both novels since the target audiences of *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* are children. Barrie and Rowling explore this theme along with the duties and responsibilities that being a child or an adult brings. Hence, in both books, childhood and adulthood are described inseparably.

The protagonists of the novels differ extensively on the theme of childhood. However, this distinction plays an important role on the characters since the concept of childhood shapes the characteristics of the protagonists. Barrie portrays Peter Pan as a charming boy whose age is unknown due to the fact that he refuses to grow up: "He was a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of the trees; but the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth" (Barrie 16). The narrator gives no clue of his parentage since he "ran away the day he was born" (Barrie 31). Peter explains the reason behind his escape as "It was because I heard father and mother ... talking about what I was to be when I became a man ... I don't want ever to become a man" (Barrie 31).

As it can be observed from the previous citation, Peter Pan is a child both at heart and nature. He outspokenly refuses to grow up: "I don't want ever to become a man" (Barrie 31). The

main reason behind Peter's refusal of growing up is the responsibilities that growing up brings. In the novel, Peter states to Wendy that: "If growing up means it would be beneath my dignity to climb a tree, I'll never grow up, never grow up, never grow up! Not me!" (Barrie 86). Peter wants to stay as a child eternally so that he can do whatever he pleases to do and be excluded from the duties of the adults. Hence, he dissents to play the role of "father" to the Lost Boys, feeling uncomfortable even when pretending. Moreover, he is unwilling to clean up his own house and asks Wendy to come back to Neverland annually to do his cleaning. Peter's unwillingness of having parents is also related to his fear of growing up and taking responsibility. Choosing a 13-year-old girl as a mother to the Lost Boys exempts Peter from the presence of a real parent who can easily put responsibility on his shoulders. Furthermore at the end of the novel, he refuses to be adopted by the Darlings, due to the fact that he would eventually have to become a man and assume responsibility.

Harry Potter, contrariwise, portrays an early "matured" child. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, "The categories of childhood and adulthood are simultaneously deconstructed and constructed, heightening the novel's various tensions, which coalesce around the issue" (McGavock). Harry's loss of parents and his early acquaintance with death along with "the oppression of Harry by Dursleys" (Miller 31), matures him quicker than his peers. Furthermore, Dursley's "disapproval of imagination" (Rowling 10) kills Harry's creativity at a young age and thus, forces him into the reality of the world. The most important factor that causes Harry's early maturity is his "speciality" in the wizardry world. Harry, who has wounded Voldemort as a baby, is considered to be the hero of the wizardry world due to the fact that he has been the only one to defeat him. Thus, his speciality puts a great responsibility on his shoulders. Unlike Peter Pan, Harry does not refuse those already assigned duties; instead he takes all of his responsibilities into consideration before acting.

When he and his friends discover that Voldemort is trying to steal the Philosopher's Stone, Harry understands his role for the wizardry world and decides to take care of the antagonist himself.

The discrepancy between the analyses of the concept of childhood and the responsibilities that a child carries is again caused by the differentiation of the societal norms between 1911 and 1997. The novel *Peter Pan and Wendy* was published just one year after the Edwardian period. Thus, the Edwardian society's views on childhood and its duties are very prominent on the novel's exploration of the theme. During the Edwardian era, poverty cast a shadow on many families, including the Darlings: "For a week or two after Wendy came it was doubtful whether they would be able to keep her as she was another mouth to feed." (Barrie 10). "I have one pound seventeen here, and two and six at the office; I can cut off my coffee at the office, say ten shillings, making two nine and six..." (Barrie 10). Along with poverty, child labour also remained a problem during the era. "While the official school leaving age throughout the Edwardian period was 13, attendance by children of poorer families was often highly irregular anyway, due to many being at work helping to provide for the family" ("Edwardian Lives"). Thus, Peter's denial of growing up and returning to the real world might be considered as a defence mechanism against the hard and austere responsibilities that are put by the living standards of the Edwardian period, in which Barrie lived. On the other hand, the novel *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was published "in a society in which kids are encouraged to behave as premature adults" (Hicklin). Hence, it is possible to say that Harry's early maturation and responsibilities are compatible with the structure of the society Rowling lives in.

### **2.3.Fantasy**

The theme of fantasy which is cogent in most of the children's literature books is also significant in *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Unlike the themes of gender roles and childhood, the exploration of the theme of fantasy shows no discrepancy between the dates of publication of the books.

The theme of fantasy is very crucial in the setting of both novels and this particular theme enhances the overall atmosphere of both novels. The main settings of *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* are Neverland and Hogwarts respectively.

The settings are in some ways similar due to their combination of fantastical elements with nature. In both novels, the combination of fantastical elements with nature allows the authors to introduce many magical characters that will be ingrained on the minds of children. Moreover, the addition of "unknown" and sometimes even "dark" magical characters intensifies the suspense of the adventures that the characters face.

Peter Pan gives the address of Neverland as "Second to the right and straight on till morning" (Barrie 40). The island of Neverland is depicted as an idyllic place for a child to live in with "coral reefs, rakish looking craft and caves through which river runs" (Barrie 13). The multicoloured environment of the island is also another factor that catches the attention of children. However, the island is not only idyllic in appearance but also is "nicely crammed" (Barrie 13) with locations, adventures and characters containing fantastical elements.

Most of the novel takes place at "Neverwoods", which is the location of the "Home Under the Ground". "Home Under the Ground", in which Peter and the Lost Boys live, is based at the hollows of trees. While depicting Neverwoods, Barrie combines nature with fantastical elements to make the woods more appealing to the child audience as in the following

example: “It consisted of one large room as all houses should do, with a floor in which you could dig if you wanted to go fishing, and in this floor grew stout mushrooms of a charming colour, which were used as stools. A Never tree tried hard to grow in the centre of the room ... By tea time it was always about two feet high and then they put a door on top of it, the whole thus becoming a table” (Barrie 70).

The combination of fantastical elements with nature is not only observed in Neverwoods but also in the other locations through the island. The lagoon, for example, is the habitat of the mermaids living in the island. This lagoon is “so vivid that with another squeeze it must go on fire” (Barrie 75). Nevertheless, the mermaids of Neverland are not quite similar to the mermaids in story books: they are dangerous and dark creatures who welcome only Peter Pan but act malevolently towards the other intruders.

Fairies, that are considered to be the primary magic users, are other magical inhabitants of the island. It is hinted throughout the novel that the fairies have created Neverland. During the novel, Peter explains to Wendy that “when the first baby laughed for the first time, its laugh broke into a thousand pieces ... and that was the beginning of fairies” (Barrie 31). Moreover, Barrie suggests that witches and gnomes live on the island but those creatures are not much elaborated on. There are also pirates residing off-shore the island in a ship called *Jolly Roger*. The pirates are led by their captain, James Hook, who is the main antagonist of the novel. The danger caused by the combat between the pirates and the inhabitants of the island creates an adventure that makes the novel animated.

The combination of magic with nature is a technique that is also well-grounded in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*. The plot of the whole series takes place in the wizardry world that coexists with the non-magical (Muggle) world. However, the fiction of the book is limited to the “Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry” which is a boarding school of

magic for wizards and witches. The school is located to the southeast to Hogsmeade, the unique settlement in the United Kingdom inhabited only by witches and wizards. The exact address of the school is unknown and the students can arrive at school only by “Hogwarts Express” which carries students between London and Hogsmeade.

Rowling pictures the Hogwarts as “Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers” (Rowling 83). The school also faces a magical forest: “The Forbidden Forest” which is restricted to the students due to the dangers it contains. The Forbidden Forest is the equivalent of Neverwoods since it consists of many magical creatures including unicorns with pearly white mane, dangerous werewolves and centaurs that are “To waist, a man... but below that was a horse’s gleaming chestnut body with a long, reddish tail” (Rowling 184). The danger of the Forbidden Forest, along with its magical creatures, creates an atmosphere that augments the tension of the novel.

Although both novels mix the magical elements with nature, there are some distinctions between the settings concerning the administration of Neverland and Hogwarts.

As an island that is home to never-growing children, Neverland is often considered to be a metaphor for eternal childhood and immortality. The reputation of the island is caused by the refusal of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys on growing up. The fact that the island is ruled by the children but has no written “rules” makes the island attractive to children and reflects the escapist sides of the characters that live on the island. Hogwarts, contrariwise, is a long-established boarding school that is under the umbrella of the Ministry of Magic. Unlike Neverland, children should abide many rules at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Headmaster Dumbledore’s speech at the first day of school depicts the strict school rules: “First years should note that forest grounds are forbidden to all pupils ... no magic

should be used between classes ... the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds...” (Rowling 94-95)

#### **2.4. The Good vs. The Evil**

The novels *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* revolve around the fight between the good -the protagonist- and the evil -the antagonist. The investigation of the theme of good vs. evil shows no discrepancy between the novels and thus, shapes the plots of both novels accordingly: the battle between the good and the bad in the community. In order to expand on this common theme, Barrie juxtaposes Peter with Captain Hook, while Rowling juxtaposes Harry with Lord Voldemort.

The lines between the good and bad in *Peter Pan and Wendy* are very clear. Peter Pan, along with Wendy and her brothers and the Lost Boys make one side, while the pirates that are led by Captain Hook make the other. Barrie prefers to demote this battle on a personal basis between Captain Hook and Peter and thus, creates a rivalry between the characters by stating how Peter cuts Hook’s hand and throws it to the crocodile: “True had he flung his arm to the crocodile; but even this ... hardly account for vindictiveness so relentless and malignant” (Barrie 110). Thus, “It was Pan [Hook] wanted, Pan and Wendy and their band, but chiefly Pan” (Barrie 110). In order to take his revenge from Peter, Hook kidnaps Wendy, her brothers and the Lost Boys and holds them at the Jolly Roger, the pirate ship. Peter fights Hook to save his friends and eventually, kills Hook by throwing him to the open jaw of the crocodile waiting below. Hence, by causing Hook’s death, Peter ends the rivalry between the good and the bad in his community, so that the good actually wins.

Although Voldemort states that: “There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it” (Rowling 211), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* stands on the battle between “the dark wizards” that are led by Lord Voldemort and the good ones that are led by Harry and Professor Dumbledore. However, just like Barrie, Rowling induces this battle and makes it more personal by adapting it to a rivalry between Harry and Voldemort, which creates the plot of the novel. Through the flashbacks, it is revealed that Harry’s parents are murdered by Voldemort as explained by Voldemort himself: “I killed your father first and he put up a courageous fight... but your mother needn’t have died.” (Rowling 213) It is asserted that while Voldemort tries to kill Harry as a baby, he loses his own body instead. After this incident, Voldemort undergoes a disappearance period which lasts ten years. When Harry starts Hogwarts School of Wizardry at the age of 11, Voldemort reappears by taking the figure of a teacher, Professor Quirrel. Thus, when Harry realizes that Voldemort is within the boundaries of school, trying to steal the Philosopher’s Stone that will provide him with eternity, he fights the spirit that killed his parents and Harry eventually wins. Thus, the success of Harry on defeating Voldemort symbolises the defeat of the dark wizards by the good ones.

### 3. Conclusion

The purpose of this analysis is to compare the common themes of the children's literature novels *Peter and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and their effects on the plot, setting and characters. During the analysis, it is observed that both novels share common themes such as gender roles, childhood, fantasy and the battle between the good and the evil.

However, the differentiation of the societal norms between the publications dates of the novels (1911 and 1997 respectively) alters the exploration of two of those common themes -childhood and gender- since both authors present their themes according to the views of the societies they lived in. For example, while exploring the theme of gender Barrie elaborates the gender roles mainly on motherhood, while Rowling's approach contains a feminist side. The differentiation of the concept of gender roles causes the change in the depictions of the female characters.

The authors' portrayals of the theme of childhood and responsibilities also differ due to the changes between the Edwardian period and the 1990s. The different explorations of the theme of childhood deeply affect the characteristics of the protagonists of the novels. Peter is outspokenly refusing to grow up and thus, he denies taking responsibility whereas Harry is early matured due to the responsibilities he assumes.

Nevertheless, the themes of fantasy and the battle between the good and the evil demonstrate no disparity between the novels. Both authors plot their novels on the battle between the good and the evil. During the novel Peter faces and fights his ultimate rival, Captain Hook whereas Harry struggles with his rival, Lord Voldemort. Moreover, the use of the theme of fantasy

enables both authors to present the settings of the novels in an imaginative way with the contribution of magical creatures as well as the combination of magical elements with nature.

All in all, Barrie and Rowling shape the structural basis of their novels on the themes they have both used, although some of those common themes demonstrate discrepancy due to the differentiation of the societal norms between the dates of publication of the books. Thus, the themes of the novels become inseparable from the plot, setting and characters of the novels.

Conclusively, it is observed that in both *Peter Pan and Wendy* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the authors skilfully use the themes of childhood, gender roles, fantasy and the battle between the good and evil to enhance the young readers' attention.

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