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## INNOCENCE, SADNESS AND FANTASY: SALINGER AND BARRIE IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

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### Resumen

El objetivo de esta contribución es realizar una aproximación a dos obras de la Literatura Infantil y Juvenil. Ambas son consideradas como textos clásicos. Nuestro interés estará centrado en el estudio de tres elementos: inocencia, tristeza y fantasía. Deseamos hallar estos conceptos en los dos libros seleccionados para la confección de esta aportación. La Literatura Infantil y Juvenil posee aspectos comunes con la realidad y es nuestra finalidad tratar de hallar dichas similitudes.

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Tanto Salinger como Barrie escribieron dos libros en los cuales podemos encontrar aspectos de la realidad relacionados tanto con niños como con adultos. Por esa razón tal vez sería pertinente debatir si estas obras son adecuadas para el público infantil y juvenil o para un público adulto. En cualquier caso, Peter Pan y Holden Cautfield son personajes que se relacionan con la Literatura infantil y Juvenil y por esa razón destacaremos como puntos centrales del texto los conceptos de inocencia y fantasía.

**Palabras clave:** literatura infantil y juvenil, inocencia, fantasía, educación.

### Abstract

The aim of this work is to carry out an approach to different works of Children's and Young Adult Literature. Both are classics in this genre. Our interest focuses on three main elements: innocence, sadness and fantasy. It is our intention to make an approach to these two books, taking into account the three already mentioned elements. Literature for Children and Young Adult people has coincidences with reality and it is our desire to show some of this similarities. Salinger and Barrie wrote two books in which we can find interesting aspects of life regarding children and Adults. Because of this, we have to discuss whether these works are suitable for Children and Young Adult people or for Adults. In any case both, Peter Pan and Holden Cautfield are fiction characters related to Children's and Young Adult Literature and because of this we have to highlight innocence and fantasy as central points of this text.

**Key words:** children's and young adult literature, innocence, fantasy, education.



## 1. The importance of stories in life

When we attempt to offer a simple and unambiguous idea of what is meant by a story, we might say that it is a short tale which involves a number of episodes. However, if we refer to stories in the way we do here, we need a more exhaustive definition. A story, then, is understood as a literary creation, either spoken or written,

in which experiences, fantasy, etc., are narrated. It can involve both fantasy and reality; it is intentionally artistic and has the ultimate objective of entertaining and teaching.

A story well told can inspire action, promote the comprehension of cultural experiences, increase children's and young adult knowledge or provide entertainment. Besides, story time is also play time. At the same time, children and young adult people enjoy an exciting experience since a symbolic space is created within the story.

In our search for promoting reading, we think fantasy in literature is a good way to motivate people to read. As Zipes (1991) stated, the fantastic could be used to compensate for the growing rationalisation of culture, work and family life in western society, to defend the imagination of children and young adult people. Both books, *Peter Pan* and *The Catcher in the Rye* treat the topic of innocence and try to preserve it from society influence. Besides this, they are stories that will pass through generations explaining reality from the point of view of children and young adult people. We cannot forget that Holden and Peter Pan's behaviour refer to childhood. Because of this, both works will help people to develop and to become better.

## 2. Literature for children and young adult people

Children are not little adults. They are different from adults in experience, but not in species, or to say it differently, in degree but not in kind. We can consider then literature for young readers as something which differs from literature for adults in degree but not in kind. We sometimes forget that literature for children and young adult people could and should provide the same enjoyment and understanding as literature for adults does.

However as Nodelman (1992) states, we can mention different elements that define this kind of Literature: is *simple and straightforward*; focuses on *action*; is about *childhood*; expresses a *child's point of view*; is *optimistic*; tends toward *fantasy*; is a form of *pastoral idyll*; views an un-idyllic world from the *viewpoint of innocence*; is *didactic*; tends to be *repetitious*; and, tends to *balance the idyllic and the didactic*. In previous works (Encabo and Varela, 2006) we used the characteristics from Hunt

(1994) or Huck and Zulantz (2001); in any case these characteristics are similar than the ones we are using in this work.

One of the books that fulfilling these characteristics but is not written for Children due to its symbolic meaning is *The Little Prince*. However, in its beginning we can find one of the best statements for the genre:

*To Leon Werth*

*I ask children to forgive me for dedicating this book to a grown-up. I have a serious excuse: this grown-up is the best friend I have in the world. I have another excuse: this grown-up can understand everything, even books for children. I have a third excuse: he lives in France where he is hungry and cold. He needs to be comforted. If all these excuses are not enough, then I want to dedicate this book to the child whom this grown-up once was. All grown-ups were children first (But few of them remember it.) So I correct my dedication: To Leon Werth when he was a little boy.*

Of course: all grown-ups were children first (but few of them remember it). As Peter Hunt (1997) says so well in his article "Passing on the Past: the problem of books that are for Children and that were for Children" (Children's Literature Quarterly, Winter 1996-1997) some books were for children, and some of them still be addressed to children. Yet many of the books we read, books by authors our parents did not know, spoke to us, and if they also speak to a later generation, our own children, they are on the way to becoming new classics. Thus, we wonder whether these books are suitable for children and young adult people. We can reflect on that the notion of Children's fiction is itself a fiction (Rose, 1984), but we prefer to think in a different way. According to Hunt, society will decide this situation, because the level of knowledge will allow young readers to understand or not these texts. *Peter Pan* and *Holden Caulfield* will remain in our minds until society decides that they are too complicated for us and innocence and fantasy are not useful to its development. We hope this will never happen.

### 3. Peter Pan: from Barrie's sadness to Nederland's bright

Peter Pan is one of the most popular of all children's classics. It blends autobiography, fancy, Oedipal myth and fantasy so satisfyingly that, like *Alice in Wonderland*, its child's world appeals and intrigues on many levels. From the moment when Peter Pan and his irritable fairy friend Tinker Bell –she was named Tinker Bell

because her special magic is mending pots and pans. In Barrie's time, a person who did this for a living was called a tinker- fly in through the nursery window, the story casts a magic spell. The Darling children are carried away to the Neverland where they meet the Lost Boys, watch shy mermaids playing in the blue lagoon and encounter Captain Hook and his wicked pirate band.

At the time James Barrie was only six years old, his older brother, David (their mother's favourite son) died. James spent the rest of his childhood trying to replace his brother for his mourning mother. The marriage with an actress named Mary Ansell was not a success, but it was during the marriage that James wrote his most successful plays, including *Peter Pan* (1904). Though the marriage had not been very happy, as a wedding gift, the couple had received a St. Bernard dog named Porthos. This dog was to be the inspiration for Nana, the Darling's dog in *Peter Pan*. It was while walking Porthos through Kensington Gardens that Barrie met the family of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies.

James's wife divorced him in 1908. That same year, Arthur Llewelyn Davies died of cancer and in 1910, his wife Sylvia followed him, with the same disease. James was left to take care of all five Davies boys; Peter, John, Michael, Nicholas, and Arthur, whom he treated like his own children. Their older sister, Wendy, had died years earlier.

James had spent time with the boys before their parent's deaths, and he wrote *Peter Pan* as a tribute to the Davies boys.

When he died, J. M. Barrie left the copyright for *Peter Pan* to the great Ormond Street Hospital for sick Children in London. Every time the book is published or the play is performed in Great Britain, the famous children's hospital receives money. No one knows how much, because J. M. Barrie wanted this to be kept a closely guarded secret. Thanks to the author's generosity, the boy who would not grow up has been helping other children for over seventy years.

James Barrie got on better with children than with grown-ups –maybe because he was only 140 centimetres tall- and loathed the whole idea of being grown up. He said that, after the age of two, life just gets worse and worse. For him, sadly, that was true: his own life was horribly unhappy. But James Barrie knew the cure for unhappiness. He knew how to climb inside his imagination and go somewhere

better. Peter Pan is really about: flying off to somewhere bigger and better than the here and now. In Neverland the colours are brighter, the heroes and heroines are braver, and the villains are more villainous.

One of the best sections of the text is as follows:

*What's your name? He asked.*

*"Wendy Moira Angela Darling", she replied with some satisfaction. "What is your name?"*

*"Peter Pan"*

*She was already sure that he must be Peter, but it did seem a comparatively short name.*

*"Is that all?"*

*"Yes", he said rather sharply. He felt for the first time that it was a shortish name.*

*"I'm so sorry", said Wendy Moira Angela.*

*"It doesn't matter", Peter gulped.*

*She asked where he lived.*

*"Second to the right", said Peter, "and then straight on till morning".*

*"What a funny address!"*

Fantasy is revealed when Peter Pan told Wendy where he lives. As we stated, in Neverland the colours are brighter and nothing is impossible. Barrie's sadness was vanished when he wrote this classic.

#### 4. The Catcher in the Rye: trying to find yourself

Person-against-society conflict is much more easily understood by adults than by children. The 1960s saw a rise in what were then called "problem novels"; often the plots focused more on social problems than on their effects on individuals. Such problems have not gone away, but today other varieties of social bullying behaviour, recent acts of violence among young people are often traced to feelings of being an "outsider". A certain amount of feeling that one is different from others is part of the growth of self awareness, as the continuing popularity of Salinger's book *Catcher in the Rye* attests.

The plot of this book regards Holden Caulfield, a sixteen-year-old boy from New York City, who tells the story of three days in his life. It seems that the adult world has driven him insane. He just cannot relate to anyone except for his sister

Phoebe. Everything and all other people seem "phony" to him. He thinks that no one is honest, and everybody wants to be something else.

Holden loses his brother, Allie, to leukaemia, and feels a tremendous loss. Allie wrote poems on an old baseball glove, and Holden cherishes this, and speaks about it in great detail. Holden constantly feels betrayed, and that is a possible cause of his problems. We can relate this with Wendy's betrayal, *Peter Pan* was believed that she betrayed him because she grew up. In a similar way to Holden's story James Barrie spent his childhood trying to replace his dead brother for his mourning mother. Somehow they are looking for innocence.

We can find innocence when Holden is talking to Phoebe and he is explaining what is really important:

*"You know that song 'If a body catch a body comin' through the rye? I'd like--" "It's 'If a body meet a body coming through the rye!' old Phoebe said. "It's a poem. By Robert Burns."*

*"I know it's a poem by Robert Burns."*

*She was right, though. It is "If a body meet a body coming through the rye." I didn't know it then, though.*

*"I thought it was 'If a body catch a body,'" I said. "Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy."*

Holden's goal is to protect innocence in the world. When he hears the "Catcher in the Rye" song being sung by a little boy, he decides that he wants to be the person that keeps children from falling off a cliff. That cliff symbolizes the transition from childhood to adulthood, and he wants to keep them as innocent children, not phony adults.

Holden is an atypical teenager. He is in the midst of an identity crisis. All teenagers go through these phases, so everyone can relate to Holden to some extent. Holden does not mature through the novel. He actually regresses back to a child-like state of mind. He feels like the only person he can talk to is his ten year old sister. For

*Peter Pan* two years old was the beginning of the end. It is the same situation than Holden's because they want to stay young forever and to preserve innocence from the dangerous society.

### Conclusions

In this section we are going to do a summary of some aspects we have seen within this text. First of all we have to say that we have taken a look at the stories written by Salinger and Barrie and we have found two excellent books that are considered classics in children's and young adult literature. Then, we have mentioned some elements that we try to highlight such as innocence, fantasy or sadness. The last element has been described when we have mentioned Allie's death (Holden's brother) or David's death (James Barrie's brother). These two situations affected the stories and create a dramatic atmosphere. Fantasy has been found above all in *Peter Pan*, we have mentioned that Barrie created Neverland to escape from his sad life and he got it. Holden's story cannot be considered as fantastic but some of the elements of the book seem to be not real.

The last element is innocence. Obviously, one of the lessons that we learn if we read *The Catcher in the Rye* is that everyone has to grown up. It is an inevitable fact. Holden cannot grasp this concept and therefore has a nervous breakdown. The ways of society are set and no single man can alter them. Because of this, we must deal with the ways of our society in order not to exclude ourselves from it.

But we must state that the boy himself –Holden- is at once too simple and too complex for us to make any final comment about him or his story. Perhaps the safest thing we can say about Holden is that he was born in the world not just strongly attracted to beauty but, almost, hopelessly impaled on it

We conclude this contribution with the principal idea in this text: *Innocence*. This idea is reflected when Holden did not want children to grow up because he felt that adults are corrupt. Our character believed that children were innocent because they viewed the world and society without any bias. This leads to Holden's dream to being the catcher in the rye.

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