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## **Betwixt-and-Between: The Ironic Failure of J.M. Barrie**

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Oral Presentation O7.3

**BETWIXT-AND-BETWEEN: THE IRONIC FAILURE OF J. M. BARRIE**

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J. M. Barrie's literary contributions have been pigeonholed for far too long as mere sentimentality, or dark psychological autobiography. His major and lasting work, *Peter Pan* (1904), is frequently viewed as nothing more than a mawkish, Edwardian glorification of boyhood, or, worse, a text fraught with Freudian revelations of a man obsessed with this mother, his dead brother, sexual impotency, and little boys. While both of these critiques contain fair and valid truths (Barrie and his psychology are often thinly veiled within his novels and plays) these two approaches have caused an unfortunate stagnancy in the analysis of Barrie's work and his contributions to literature.

The scope of Barrie's work has also been largely ignored. His plays, naturally, receive the most critical attention, as do a few of his novels. His journalistic works are by far the most under-explored and under-documented. Barrie launched his career as a writer by working as a freelance journalist in London between 1885 and 1889. During those four years, Barrie contributed hundreds of articles to over twenty-one British periodicals. The bulk of Barrie's articles were published by editor Frederick Greenwood in a conservative evening paper, *The St. James's Gazette*.

Barrie's articles for *The St. James's Gazette* deserve greater attention. Barrie was a prolific and successful journalist, and to ignore this important part of his career is to miss the birth of Barrie's life-long dissatisfaction with British society, and his struggle to find a solid personal identity. A closer reading of Barrie's previously unanalyzed contributions to *The St. James's Gazette* reveals significant themes of social and psychological discontent. This, in turn, sheds new light on his most famous work, *Peter Pan*, and the precursors to *Peter Pan*, namely his 1902 novel, *The Little White Bird*. *The Little White Bird* wrestles with the same overarching themes of social disconnection and identity crisis that emerge in *The St. James's Gazette* articles. Using *The St. James's Gazette* articles as the key to this later novel, new possibilities emerge for the exploration of Barrie's work.