



Hide-and-Seek with Angels: A Life of J. M. Barrie

By Lisa Chaney

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What kind of man creates a boy who never grows up? More than 100 years after *Peter Pan* first appeared on the London stage, author J. M. Barrie remains one of the most complex and enigmatic figures in modern literature. A few facts, of course, are widely known: *Peter Pan* made Barrie the richest author of his time, and he bequeathed the royalties to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. He was married, but later divorced, and he was devoted to the orphaned sons of Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, one of whom was named Peter. And then the rumors begin--about the nature of his marriage; about his precise relationship with the Davies boys, whose guardian he became; about the fantasies and demons that determined his achievements.

In this brilliant biography, Lisa Chaney goes beyond the myths to discover the fascinating, frequently misunderstood man behind the famous boy. James Matthew Barrie was born in a village in Scotland in 1860, the ninth of 10 children of a linen-weaver and his wife. When James was six years old, his older brother died in a skating accident, and his mother began her withdrawal into grief. It is not an exaggeration to say that Barrie's entire life--both his professional triumphs as a writer and his personal tragedies--led up to the creation of *Peter Pan*, the play where "all children except one grow up." As Lisa Chaney explores Barrie's own struggles to grow up, she deepens our understanding both of his most famous character and of the complex relationship between life and art.

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Hide-and-Seek with Angels: A Life of J. M. Barrie By Lisa Chaney Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #217133 in Books
- Published on: 2006-06-27
- Released on: 2006-06-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.50" h x 1.25" w x 6.45" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 432 pages



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Editorial Review

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Obsessed with time and mortality, James Barrie created in *Peter Pan* a myth with enduring, worldwide appeal. Chaney thoughtfully examines Barrie's inner life from childhood in Kirriemuir, Scotland, to wild, international success. She describes young James as unexceptional, small for his age, but "cheerful enough," though not much was expected of him. When beloved elder brother David died accidentally, James perfected David's mannerisms and wore his clothes to assuage his grieving mother--unsuccessfully. Even that early, he was a natural storyteller who needed to perform and make himself visible. But when he announced he wanted to be a writer, his parents were flabbergasted. Later, after Barrie moved to London and achieved fame and fortune, Kirriemuir represented for him all that was good and wholesome, and he returned to it again and again. Chaney discusses Barrie's work (many successful novels and plays), ill-fated marriage, complex mother-son relationship, friendship with Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and her sons, and the origins and evolution of his masterpiece so as to bring to life a most complicated, enigmatic, and melancholy man. *June Sawyers*

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Review

"An excellent new biography."

--A.S. Byatt

About the Author

LISA CHANEY has lectured and tutored in the history of art and literature, and has written for journals and newspapers, including the *Sunday Times*, *The Spectator* and the *Guardian*.

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