

## Article

# The Absence of God in J. M. Barrie's Post-War Writings: *Mary Rose* (1920) and *Courage* (1922)

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**Abstract:** J. M. Barrie (1860–1937) remains best known as the creator of *Peter Pan* (1904), celebrated as a whimsical eccentric who wrote sad stories about lost children. In his own day, however, he was respected as Scotland's leading dramatist and a trenchant social critic. His writings from the years following the First World War are much darker in tone than his earlier work, as a series of intense personal bereavements shook his aesthetic embrace of Christian Humanism. God exists in Barrie's post-war works as the presence of absence, a vacancy where the divine ought to be but where an inexplicable experience of bereavement hangs instead. This paper considers the nature of God's absence in two of Barrie's major post-war works, the drama *Mary Rose* (1920) and the lecture *Courage* (1922), through the interrelated images of the crucified body of Christ and the absent λόγος.

**Keywords:** J. M. Barrie (1860–1937); Scottish literature; Scottish Christianity; God; First World War; bereavement; drama; Peter Pan



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## 1. Introduction

J. M. Barrie (1860–1937) is among the most famous Scottish writers of the twentieth century. As the creator of *Peter Pan*, he is one of three *fin de siècle* Scots whose literary creations have entrenched themselves in the public imagination. (The other two are Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) and Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), both of whom Barrie knew and loved.)<sup>1</sup> Barrie earned critical and popular admiration throughout the 1890s and 1900s, with the runaway success of the stage production for *Peter Pan* (1904) establishing him as a cultural force. By end of the First World War, Barrie was recognised as Britain's foremost playwright, respected not just as a whimsical writer of Scottish stories and children's theatre but as a trenchant and perceptive social commentator (cf. Farkas 2013, pp. 197–209).

Despite the acclaim he enjoyed, and despite the continued revivals of his earlier plays, the last two decades of his life saw a profound darkening on the tone of his works. Barrie himself identified this tonal shift and playfully attributed it to writing with his left hand after sustaining a repetitive strain injury to his right (Barrie 1919, p. 130; Barrie [1937] 2018, p. 157; Birkin 2003, p. 284; Mackail 1941, p. 540). It is not difficult, however, to find a more likely cause than writer's cramp. On 15 March 1915, George Llewelyn Davies, the eldest of Barrie's five adopted sons, was killed in action in Flanders (Birkin 2003, p. 243ff). In 1916, Peter Llewelyn Davies, the third of the five, was deployed to the Somme, only to be sent home two months later severely shell-shocked (Birkin 2003, p. 257; Chaney 2005, p. 315). Barrie's two nephews were killed the same year, as well as close friends and the sons of close friends. George M. Johnson, in his study on mourning in World War I literature, rightly notes that 'Barrie's grieving was long, complicated, and never resolved' (Johnson 2015, p. 133; cp. Birkin 2003, pp. 244–46). In 1917, Peter was redeployed, and Barrie himself travelled to the Western Front to find George's grave. The tonal darkening of Barrie's work begins with this bereaved pilgrimage and his act of witness to the grotesque inhumanity of war.

As well as the grief it brought him personally, the war ruptured the philosophical conceptions which had undergirded Barrie's writing. R. D. S. Jack has convincingly argued that Barrie's literary aesthetic embraced the Christian Humanism he had learned from his professors at the University of Edinburgh, David Masson (1822–1907) and Alexander Campbell Fraser (1819–1914) (Jack 2010a, chp. 1). This, Jack claims, entailed

an inclusive differentiated mode of argument modelled on the classical topos, *varius sis [et] tamen idem* ['let (meaning) be manifold and yet the same']. An imaginative writer, may, therefore, be at once fanciful *and* naturalistic, sentimental *and* cerebral, comic *and* serious, depending on the defined terms of reference. (Jack 2010a, pp. 55–56)<sup>2</sup>

Jack argues that such 'inclusive dialectics' can be possible because the totalising nature of God's infinitude contains all possible expressions of truth (Jack 2010a, p. 56). Barrie's late-Victorian and Edwardian works largely enact this view with purposeful juxtapositions of markedly different literary modes. For instance, the novel *The Little White Bird* (1902), an introspective character study of midlife self-absorption and loneliness, also incorporated the entire text of a children's book, which Barrie later shrewdly marketed as the standalone volume *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906). Darkness and melancholy are not infrequent presences throughout Barrie's earlier writings, but they generally remain in the background or subtext, forming only part of a broadly humanistic whole. After the war, Barrie's works demonstrate the breakdown of the 'inclusive dialectics' which had animated his work. Meaning becomes isolated, unable to be communicated outside an enclosed, self-referential experience of perpetual loss. His richly interconnected, multi-modal texts give way to studies of fragmented selves without promise of resolution or wholeness. As Jack's analysis suggests, this is a theological as well as aesthetic understanding: God exists in Barrie's post-war writings as the presence of absence, a vacancy where the divine ought to be but where an inexplicable experience of bereavement hangs instead.

This paper begins by describing Barrie's troubling vision of God. In particular, it focuses on his play *Mary Rose* (1920), offering a reading that situates it in relation to his rectorial lecture at the University of St Andrews, *Courage* (1922). It looks first at the marked absence of God in *Mary Rose* before turning to consider how a similar absence emerges through the seemingly pious invocations of God in *Courage*. It then examines two closely interrelated literary images through which Barrie expresses this broken dialectic: the body of Christ Crucified and the absent λόγος (*logos*). The paper does not assert that Barrie programmatically created these images along ontotheological lines, nor does it pretend to cast new light on Barrie's already overworked biography.<sup>3</sup> Rather, it suggests that these images offer interpretative possibilities for understanding how Barrie's religious thinking shaped his writings in the years following the First World War. Deeply troubled, even traumatised, by a series of bereavements, Barrie wrote works which give a voice to the profundities of grief in an indifferent universe.

## 2. 'The Crafty Work Begins'

*Mary Rose* was Barrie's first major play after the war ended. A magnificent, eerie tale of the Scottish Gothic, it recounts the return of an ANZAC soldier, Harry Morland Blake, to his family home in England (Barrie [1924] 1995a, pp. 239–98).<sup>4</sup> His mother, Mary Rose, had vanished when he was a baby, and Harry himself had run away when he was twelve. He finds his childhood home derelict, all but abandoned—and haunted. Left alone in the parlour, he experiences a prolonged flashback, witnessing the events around Mary Rose's disappearance. This takes up most of the play, running from the second half of Act 1 through to the first half of Act 3. Mary Rose enters as a young woman, brim-full with life and vitality, climbing through the parlour window from the apple tree in the garden to tell her parents she is engaged to Simon Blake, a sweetly boyish midshipman in the Royal Navy. Her parents are concerned and privately confide to Simon the terrible secret they

have kept from Mary Rose: on a holiday in the Hebrides, seven years earlier, Mary Rose vanished. She had become fond of playing on a small island in the loch, her mother says:

We didn't know at the time that the natives had a superstition against landing on the island, and that it was supposed to resent this. It had a Gaelic name which means 'The Island that Likes to be Visited.' Mary Rose knew nothing of this and was very fond of her island. (1.632–36)

On the last day of the holiday, after spending the day fishing, her father rows out to bring her home 'but, Simon, when I got across she wasn't there' (1.644–45). There is nowhere Mary Rose could have gone, yet she has gone. For twenty days, her parents and the local islanders search to no avail. Then, as softly and suddenly as she had vanished away, Mary Rose reappears on the island, cheerfully oblivious that she has been gone or that any time has passed.

Her parents never tell her about her terrifying disappearance. They fear that the experience has made her unnatural. Her mother describes her as somehow frozen: 'you know how just a touch of frost may stop the growth of a plant and yet leave it blooming—it has sometimes seemed to me as if a cold finger had once touched my Mary Rose' (1.701–3). They worry, too, that for this reason bluff, blokey Simon will refuse to marry her. Wisely or unwisely, he is unafraid—so much that, a few years after their marriage, when their son Harry is a baby, he agrees to holiday in the Hebrides with her to see 'The Island that Likes to be Visited'. Once there, Mary Rose hears the island call her and vanishes again. This time, it is twenty-five years before she reappears—a young woman still, bewildered and agitated to find that her husband has become an old man. She is unable to comprehend, too, that Harry has grown up and run away from home and that her jolly little baby is nowhere to be found. When the flashback concludes, Harry discovers his mother's ghost, still a childlike young woman, wandering through the cold rooms, looking for her baby. The ghost of Mary Rose, however, fails to recognise Harry as her own lost boy.

The return of a mother's ghost is a frequent motif in folklore, and Barrie had been mulling it as the premise for a story since at least 1892, mentioning it briefly in *The Little White Bird* (Barrie [1902] 2000, pp. 33–34; cf. Chaney 2005, pp. 333–34).<sup>5</sup> A visit to Loch Voshimid (Bhoisimid) on Harris in 1912 further suggested the idea of the otherworldly island (Birkin 2003, p. 205; Chaney 2005, pp. 333–34; cf. Mackail 1941, pp. 441–43). It was not until after the war, however, that his ideas cohered. He wrote the play almost obsessively from August 1919 through to the start of rehearsals in April 1920 (Ormond 1983, p. 59; Birkin 2003, pp. 205–6, 284; cp. Chaney 2005, p. 333). Alastair McIntosh has convincingly argued that *Mary Rose* should be approached as a 'psychodrama' which 'explores childhood trauma in the immediate aftermath of the First World War' (McIntosh Forthcoming). Indeed, *Mary Rose* can be read as a culmination of Barrie's wartime plays, the only full-length play to deal directly with the war (cf. Wixson 2013, pp. 208–12). Short plays such as *The New Word* (1915) and *A Well-Remembered Voice* (1918) depict the war's effect on ordinary, middle-class families whose sons were sent to die in the trenches (Barrie 1918a). Similarly, the context of the war is evident in *Mary Rose* from the moment of Harry's 'slouching' and 'unsentimental' entrance (1.44, 52). Barrie's stage directions indicate that the audience should immediately identify him as 'a young Australian soldier, a private' (1.43). As Leonee Ormond has noted, '[w]ith his rough speech and masculine manner, Harry would have been a recognizable figure in 1919, a soldier who had survived the Great War but who was coarsened by the experience' (Ormond 1983, p. 60; cp. Wixson 2013, p. 208). Paradoxically, unlike the bereaved parents of the wartime plays, it is Harry, the soldier, who has been bereaved. In his opening scene, he comports himself with a devil-may-care insouciance which recalls the character Kenneth Dowey, a Black Watch private, in *The Old Lady Shows Her Medals* (1917). Also like Dowey, Harry's bravado is at least partly a façade. His loneliness and melancholy become increasingly apparent, and by Act 3, he emerges as a tender, more sentimental figure, trying to comfort his mother's ghost.

Harry's trauma is both personal and multigenerational, entailing the loss of his parents, grandparents, and childhood home. It is even possible to view *Mary Rose* as a prolonged

episode of shell shock. His dazed confusion at the end of the flashback, and his insistence that he was not merely dreaming, seems to support such a reading (3.405–16). Barrie had witnessed the effects of severe shell shock on Peter Llewellyn Davies, so symptoms such as flashbacks and recurring nightmares would likely not have been unfamiliar to him (Birkin 2003, p. 257; cf. Crocq and Crocq 2000, pp. 47–55; Jones et al. 2007, pp. 1641–45; Loughran 2012, pp. 94–119). Michael Llewellyn Davies, too, the fourth of the five brothers, seems to have suffered regular night terrors after the death of his father; Barrie would sit up with him through the episode and soothe him when he woke (Birkin 2003, pp. 157–59).<sup>6</sup> Certainly, the association between personal trauma, war trauma, and nightmare formed a potent part of Barrie's experience by the time he wrote *Mary Rose*. Perhaps Harry's return to his abandoned childhood home triggers a dissociative state in which the memory of his family's trauma becomes more real than his own experience. Or perhaps Harry becomes a conduit for the trauma held in the house itself. The stage directions note: 'The room is in a tremble of desire to get started upon that nightly travail which can never be completed till this man is here to provide the end' (1.248–49).

The room's desire for 'the end' brings God into the play. J. R. R. Tolkien has noted that *Mary Rose* incorporates elements from folktales about 'how men and women have disappeared and spent years among the fairies, without noticing the passage of time, or appearing to grow older', even though in the play itself '[n]o fairy is seen. The cruelly tormented human beings are there all the time' (Tolkien 2006, p. 160). Tolkien suggests that the play is not about faerie itself but about 'the impact upon human characters of some event of Fantasy, or Faerie, that requires no machinery, or that can be assumed or reported to have happened. But that is not fantasy in dramatic result; the human characters hold the stage and upon them attention is concentrated' (Tolkien 2006, p. 160). Tolkien's reading is generally correct, yet he overlooks both the technical virtuosity which a successful staging of *Mary Rose* requires and the importance of stagecraft to the meaning of the play. After Harry is left alone in the parlour, the stage directions say:

He is now part of the room, the part long waited for, come back at last. The house is shaken to its foundation by his presence, we may conceive a thousand whispers. Then the crafty work begins. (1.233–36)

Peter Hollindale has observed that 'crafty work' here refers both to stagecraft and 'the [technical] challenge of effective scene-changing' from the dramatic present to the flashback and 'the craftiness of time, place, and atmosphere, the elusive power of the supernatural and the disturbing oddity of time's effects' (Hollindale 1995, p. 332). This second form of craftiness is what McIntosh identifies with the otherworld of faerie, in Gaelic called the *sìthean*, limning it 'as a realm of consciousness—the lore of which permeates the island [of Harris] and remains in remnant, but still-just-present experience' (McIntosh Forthcoming). In Act 2, the stage directions indicate a similar 'craftiness', detailing an elaborate musical set-piece as Mary Rose hears the island's call and disappears (2.555ff). Such stage effects to indicate a brush against the otherworld is redolent of the use of lighting for the dream-child Margaret's disappearance into the greenwood in *Dear Brutus* (1917) (Barrie 1922b, pp. 97–98). The house in *Mary Rose* thus is staged to appear akin to the faerie hill, drawing Harry into its glamourie through the 'crafty' unfolding of layered realms of story, in an attempt to resolve its ongoing, repetitive trauma.

Yet Harry simply does not know how to 'provide the end' to his family trauma. He tells his mother's ghost: 'the thing fair beats me. There is nothing I wouldn't do for you, but a mere man is so helpless. How should the likes of me know what to do with a ghost that has lost her way on earth?' (3.645–48). Harry expresses a vague hope that God will come to her rescue, remarking, 'He would surely send for you, if He wanted you', but adding that '[i]t's like as if He had forgotten you' (3.639, 641). As the play ends, Harry looks at the sky:

HARRY: What a night of stars! Good old glitterers, I dare say they are in the know, but I am thinking you are too small a thing to get a helping hand from them.

MARY ROSE: Yes. (3.652–55)



This is the final dialogue in the play. The stage directions indicate that the musical cue of the island's call 'is again heard' with 'no unholy sound', and 'the weary little ghost knows that her long day is done. [ . . . ] The smallest star shoots down for her, and with her arms stretched forth to it trustingly she walks out through the window into the empyrean.' Crucially, however, 'Harry hears nothing, but he knows that somehow a prayer has been answered' (3.655ff).

A review of a recent musical adaptation of *Mary Rose* commented sniffily about this 'sentimentally spiritual resolution', regarding it as somehow untruthful to the 'emotional subtext' of the story (Williams 2022).<sup>7</sup> This misapprehends what has and has not happened in the final sequence. Mary Rose has gone 'somehow', but Harry remains as helpless and as ignorant as before. Seemingly, 'a prayer has been answered', but the phrase eludes easy explanation: which prayer? answered how? and by whom? The play resists tidy resolution of these questions. Significantly, God is not directly mentioned in the dialogue, with only the capitalised 'He' to indicate to the actor that God is being spoken of and no cue for the audience at all. They are left to infer who 'He' is from their own religious backgrounds and how the actor delivers the line, nor is there any indication that it is God who has answered the prayer, or indeed has done anything at all. The lyricism of Harry's exclamation 'What a night of stars!' only serves to emphasise the impassivity of divine help. In *Peter and Wendy* (1911), Barrie's novelisation of his own play, the laconic narrator remarks, 'Stars are beautiful, but they may not take an active part in anything, they must just look on for ever. It is a punishment put on them for something they did so long ago that no star now knows what it was' (Barrie 2011, p. 35). The impotent benevolence of the stars and their capricious punishment for an unknown offence anticipate the absence of God in *Mary Rose*. The context has changed, however, from a droll history of why stars twinkle to a meditation on eternity and damnation. The only actions God takes in *Mary Rose* is first to forget her, perhaps as punishment for breaking some unspecified law, and then to remain aloof and inscrutable while the ending unfolds, leaving Harry alone on a silent stage (3.648–50, 655ff). For Harry, this is not redemption but abandonment; God is not kindly present but cruelly absent. Nor is this absence the strictly material world of atheism, but rather a profound hollowness where God should be—a cosmic, eternal vacancy against which the words of the faithful echo and die away.

### 3. 'The Lad That Will Never Be Old'

In many ways, *Courage* can be read as an elaboration on the themes of *Mary Rose*, notably the divine absence in the face of trauma. Cynthia Asquith (1887–1960), Barrie's personal secretary, recounted that Barrie was elected as Rector of St Andrews in November 1919 (Asquith 1955, p. 66). A letter Barrie wrote to Charles Whibley on 25 November 1919, mentioning details of *Mary Rose*, indicates he was almost certainly writing Act 3 at the time (Barrie 1919, p. 130). The definite need to prepare a rectorial address, then, presented itself during the final weeks of writing *Mary Rose*.

*Courage* seems to provide a far sunnier view of God than *Mary Rose*. Early in the lecture, Barrie defines 'courage' as 'the lovely virtue—the rib of Himself that God sent down to His children' (Barrie 1922a, p. 7). He goes on to reassure the listening undergraduates:

There are glorious years lying ahead of you if you choose to make them glorious. God's in His heaven still. So forward, brave hearts. To what adventures I cannot tell, but I know that your God is watching to see whether you are adventurous. (Barrie 1922a, p. 16)

Here, God seems not only present but engaged, benevolently attentive to the courageous young people in a way which undercuts the sense of divine absence described above. Of course, it could be objected that two brief mentions of God on a formal occasion, when the speaker is expected to be edifying, hardly indicate broader patterns of theological belief—but this is too glib, falling victim to a critical inattentiveness that skates over the subtleness of Barrie's literary mind.

The elegance of Barrie's style conceals layers of ambiguity and self-contradictory possible meanings held in interlocking structures, linguistic patterns, and complex webs of literary allusion. Jack rightly argues that 'Barrie was a master stylist [ . . . ] of the school of Flaubert', whose writings evince meticulous craftsmanship and reward attentive close reading (Jack 2010b, p. 254). Notably, though the lecture was not given until 1922, Asquith remarks that 'the obligation, I think, lay heavy on [Barrie's] mind all through the long delay' and recalls how he 'took infinite trouble over his Address. Draft after draft was written—and scrapped' (Asquith 1955, p. 67). Such intensive re-working was characteristic. Hollindale notes:

Barrie's unending revisionism is not just the obsessive tinkering of a perfectionist or indecisive theatrical craftsman; it is the artistic projection of a philosophical stance which was sceptical of fixed and permanent truth, and convinced of relativity, of circumstantial change, seeing life and art alike as fluid and provisional. (Hollindale 1995, p. xi)

Elsewhere, Jack describes Barrie as 'knowingly tricking' his audience, not only concealing different meanings within the text but allowing them to 'subversively [ . . . ] contradict each other' (Jack 2014, p. 34).

Such subtle trickery seems to be at work in Barrie's lecture at St. Andrews. *Courage* is a strange and difficult text. Charles E. Morris III rightly noted its atmosphere 'not [of] mystery, but knowledge that is hidden' (Morris III 1996, p. 210). It presents itself with all the inspirational insouciance of a commencement address, yet is in fact a cryptic, threefold eulogy: for George Llewelyn Davies, for all the young war dead, and—perhaps most of all—for Michael Llewelyn Davies, who had drowned nearly a year earlier in a freak accident (Birkin 2003, pp. 291–94; Mackail 1941, p. 560f; McAulay 2007). Just twenty years old, Michael had been an undergraduate at Oxford, and Barrie was keenly aware that most of his audience were undergraduates about the same age. He later wrote: 'It was not St Andrew's [*sic*] students I was seeing on that occasion, but an Oxford one' (quoted in Birkin 2003, p. 295).

Attentive close reading reveals a markedly different tone than simple piety in the mentions of God in *Courage*. When Barrie declares 'God's in His heaven still' (Barrie 1922a, p. 16), the plain literary allusion is to the famous lines from Robert Browning's dramatic poem *Pippa Passes* (1841): 'God's in His heaven—/ All's right with the world!' (Browning [1841] 1988, lines 227–28). The couplet expresses an innocent girl's simple faith in the right ordering of creation, with larks and snails each in their proper habitat and morning arriving punctually at seven o'clock. The point of Pippa's song, then, is that 'All's right with the world!', a summation of a divine order apprehended through the innocent observation of small things in nature. God in heaven is proof and surety that the cosmos is appointed as it should be (cf. Kennedy and Hair 2007, p. 72f). Barrie truncates the quotation: 'God's in His heaven still.' The rightness of the world is notably absent. Much, indeed, had gone cruelly wrong during the lifetimes of the young men and women whom Barrie was addressing. Thus, he remarks grimly, 'In 1922, we are all wondering, and so are they, what they meant in 1914 and afterwards' (Barrie 1922a, p. 13). Anna Farkas is right to identify the 'searing critique of the management of the war' that underlies the lecture (Farkas 2013, p. 206), nor does Barrie offer a much brighter depiction of the future. He observes that 'there must be a number here to-day' of war survivors, who 'want you to be wiser than they were, and are certainly determined to be wiser next time themselves' (Barrie 1922a, p. 11). This may simply mean wiser about whether to go to war at all. It could also be taken to mean being wise enough to not survive. Certainly, the assertion—correct, as happened—that there will be a 'next time' for world war during the lives of the survivors strikes a jarring note in an ostensibly uplifting address.

All, then, is not right with the world, for all that God's in His heaven. Furthermore, Barrie appends the clarification that 'God's in His heaven *still*' (Barrie 1922a, p. 16, emphasis added). This richly ambiguous wording contains three distinct readings. First, God *still* reigns from Heaven, proof of the world's right ordering despite the horrors of the Great

War. Alternatively, God *sits still* in Heaven, impotent and inactive, either not caring about the world's wrongness or not able to intervene. Or perhaps, third, God is *still in Heaven*, having never come down; there has been no incarnation and thus no redemption. The pious allusion conceals thus potentially unanswerable questions of theodicy, replacing God's presence with the pain of his absence and inaction.

The mention of God thus creates a destabilising effect in the lecture, emphasising the need for individual, independently willed courage rather than trust in any cosmic ordering or divine intervention. Barrie claims, '[t]here are glorious years ahead of you' but only 'if you choose to make them glorious' (Barrie 1922a, p. 16). They are not glorious in themselves and in fact may not be glorious at all without such a deliberate choice. Given the strong scriptural association of 'glory' with God's presence, the need of the courageous individual to actively create glory further suggests God's absence from future time, or perhaps time altogether. As the lecture progresses, the nature of what *glory* may be seems increasingly fraught. Barrie tells the undergraduates:

You will all fall into one of [ . . . ] two callings, the joyous or the uncongenial; and one wishes you into the first, though our sympathy, our esteem, must go rather to the braver ones who 'turn their necessity to glorious gain' after they have put away their dreams. (Barrie 1922a, p. 26)

The quotation here is from William Wordsworth's poem 'Character of the Happy Warrior' (1807), written to memorialise Lord Nelson and Wordsworth's brother John, who had also died in naval combat (Wordsworth 2015, p. 70 note 1). The poem describes 'the generous Spirit' which 'every man should wish to be',

Who, doom'd to go in company with Pain,  
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!  
Turns his necessity to glorious gain [ . . . ] (Wordsworth 2015, lines 12–14)

Stirring stuff, perhaps, though it is somewhat unremarkable for a public lecture in the years following the war, when Wordsworth's poem enjoyed widespread popularity (Vance 1997, pp. 95–96). There are, however, two salient aspects to the allusion which elevate it above mere tubthumping. The first is Wordsworth's description of the warrior as 'doom'd', evoking both a sense of fate and of an unhappy end. The warrior himself has no choice in the matter. The second is Barrie's acknowledgement that those in this 'uncongenial' calling have 'put away their dreams'. Glory, in this sense, is tantamount with accepting grim, unavoidable fate and going 'in company with' physical and mental suffering, with the knowledge that they cannot fulfill their youthful aspirations. This recalls Barrie's adjuration that gloriousness is a choice, further emphasising that nowhere in future time, or in future wars, will glory be innate.

Glory in *Courage* seems to be associated with youth and with youthful dreams. Thus, Barrie describes his early years as an eager young journalist, remarking,

The greatest glory that has ever come to me was to be swallowed up in London, not knowing a soul, with no means of subsistence, and the fun of working till the stars went out. To have known any one would have spoilt it. (Barrie 1922a, p. 24)

Here, glory is unambiguously associated with anonymity and isolation, the ability to vanish into a big city and be entirely unknown and unconnected from the workaday world; Barrie would later romanticise these years still further in his quasi-memoir *The Greenwood Hat* (1930). However, the glory was fleeting—a dream to be laid aside as the weight of adulthood settles in. There is also a curious echo in this passage of *Mary Rose*, when Harry describes the 'lovely' world where Mary Rose had vanished to as 'that glory place' (3.637). The question which haunts *Courage* is: what of those who never escape such anonymous glory, who never put away youthful dreams because they died in their youth?

As *Courage* draws to its close, it turns to the Gothic mode. Spirits, Barrie declares, 'must sometimes walk St. Andrews. I do not mean the ghosts of queens or prelates, but one that keeps step, as soft as snow, with some poor student' (Barrie 1922a, p. 34). This passage

presents a complex web of allusion. The mention of ‘queens or prelates’ is a suitable local colour for a St Andrews audience. Mary, Queen of Scots, (1542–1587) loved the city and owned a house there, as Barrie mentions later (Barrie 1922a, pp. 44–45). The ‘prelates’ presumably refer to Cardinal David Beaton (c. 1494–1546), who was killed outside St Andrews Castle, and John Knox (c. 1514–1572), whom Barrie discusses along with Queen Mary. Barrie merely nods towards such well-known St Andrews ghosts before introducing instead the spectral presence of the seeker with steps ‘as soft as snow’.

The reference to ‘snow’ is odd. It is the only occurrence of the word in the lecture and the first mention of weather. Unlike the allusions leading up to it, it has no clear local relevance: snow is uncommon in St Andrews.<sup>8</sup> It appears to be an allusion to the famous refrain of ‘Ballade des dames du temps jadis’ by François Villon (?1431–?1463): ‘Mais où sont les neiges d’antan?’ (‘But where shall last year’s snow be found?’) (Villon 2014, p. 53; Wilbur 1964, pp. 81, 82). This was a text Barrie apparently knew: in 1914 or 1915, he favourably reviewed Henry de Vere Stacpoole’s new metrical translation of Villon’s poetry (see de Vere Stacpoole 1915, p. 84).<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more tellingly, on 4 December 1922, Barrie wrote a long letter to Rosalie Masson imagining a meeting with Robert Louis Stevenson during their student days, culminating in a bizarre sequence in which Stevenson chases Barrie among the streets of Edinburgh through ‘the blinding snow’ of a blizzard (Barrie 1922c, p. 252; cp. Barrie and Stevenson 2020, pp. 216–22). As Michael Shaw has noted, the letter serves as a surreal parody of Stevenson’s short story ‘A Lodging for the Night’ (1877), which features Villon as its protagonist (Barrie and Stevenson 2020, p. 55). Barrie certainly knew the story: in one of his letters to Stevenson, he discusses *The New Arabian Nights* (1882), the collection in which ‘A Lodging for the Night’ appeared (Barrie 1893, p. 125). Barrie imitates not only the general setting of that story but specifically its use of snow to create a sense of the uncanny and the presence of death.

Interfacing this passage with Villon’s text suggests that it may be the presence ‘du temps jadis’ (of time past) which haunts the ‘poor student’, keeping his silent pace along The Scores. Where the student is walking, hundreds of other students have walked before. They are not merely ghosts and memories, such as those left by Queen Mary or Cardinal Beaton, but rather the overwhelming sense of ‘beauty boiling over, or a soul boiling over’, as Barrie describes earlier: ‘Ages may pass as we look or listen, for time is annihilated’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 33). The presence of time past encompasses the absence of time present. Too great an awareness of such beauty may, indeed, be perilous, pinning the entranced soul on a moment in which time does not exist. Barrie calls these haunting spirits, these glimpses of an overwhelming beauty beyond time, ‘the seekers’:

If the seekers were kind, he is one for whom the flags of his college would fly one day. But the seeker I am thinking of is unfriendly, and so our student is ‘the lad that will never be old’. (Barrie 1922a, pp. 34–35)

The seeker perhaps offers the student a vision of beauty, which not only fails to equip him for worldly success, but which slyly and cruelly draws him away from the things of this world with a beauty which is also terror: ‘life is so beautiful to him that its proportions are monstrous’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 34). This causes the student to slip quietly away from his friends and classmates—‘his fellows can never quite touch him, their best beloved’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 34).

It is tempting to associate this passage with Laurence Binyon’s famous elegy ‘For the Fallen’ (1914), with its invocation of the war dead who ‘shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old’ (Binyon 1914, line 13). It does not seem improbable that Barrie would have been familiar with this poem. The allusion in *Courage*, however, is unambiguous: Barrie is quoting directly from A. E. Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad* (1887). Cynthia Asquith notes that Barrie felt ‘intense admiration’ for Housman and read *A Shropshire Lad* every year (Asquith 1955, p. 59; Birkin 2003, p. 262). Housman’s description of the young men at Ludlow Fair finds clear resonances in *Courage*:



The lads in their hundreds to Ludlow come in for the fair,  
 There's men from the barn and the forge and the mill and the fold,  
 The lads for the girls and the lads for the liquor are there,  
 And there with the rest are the lads that will never be old.  
 (Housman 1924b, p. 33, lines 1–4)

The poem evokes an eerie sense of foreboding, noting how there is no way to recognise who may be doomed for early death or which farewell may be the last (lines 9–12). Only these 'fortunate fellows' (line 10), the poet says, preserve the beauty and dignity of their humanity: 'They carry back bright to the coiner the mintage of man, / The lads that will die in their glory and never be old' (lines 15–16).

Barrie and Binyon may have this poem as a common source. Tracing Barrie's allusion to Housman, however, emphasises that, rather than limiting himself to memorialising the war, Barrie appears to have a broader existential context in mind for *Courage*. The young dead in *A Shropshire Lad* are not the war dead; they are, and can be, anyone who chances to die young. For the young to 'die in their glory' is to die untimely, with youthful eagerness and innocence still unsullied. The unfriendly seeker appears to be seeking those few and hastening them towards their end. To choose a life of glory—to choose to make future years glorious—is perhaps 'to slip betimes away / From fields where glory does not stay' (Housman 1924a, p. 26, lines 9–10). This is not an invitation to self-destruction but rather an admission of what is inevitable, with respect and envy for those spared the uncongenialities of labour, aging, and the putting aside of dreams.

For Barrie, the ideal of the 'poor student' singled out for glory is Michael Llewelyn Davies. To conclude this section of the lecture, he reads one of Michael's poems. It describes a youth standing on a mountain in the Scottish isles, looking out to sea while

the white mists eddied, trailed and spun  
 like seekers, emulous to clasp his knees,  
 till all the beauty in the scene seemed one (Barrie 1922a, p. 35)

The 'seekers' are Michael's image, describing 'the white mists' on the island, their movements offering their tempting, totalising sense of beauty. Barrie has wrapped Michael's words into the allusive texture of his prose as surely as he has the words of Housman, Villon, Wordsworth, and the rest.

#### 4. 'The Lovely Virtue'

The text of *Courage* itself thus enacts the active haunting of the past which it describes. With its rich texture of literary allusion, both reverential and subversive, it creates a choric discourse with dead authors, drawing fragments of poems together to infuse them with new meaning. In *Courage*, the past is perpetually present, and the present is fully contained within the past. To borrow T. S. Eliot's formation from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1917), Barrie writes with 'a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence' (Eliot 1945, p. 49). As Eliot would write much later,

Time present and time past  
 Are both perhaps present in time future,  
 And time future contained in time past. (Eliot 1969a, p. 171, lines 1–3)

The thematic echo between Eliot and Barrie is most likely coincidental, but the coincidence is instructive. Both authors had aesthetic and personal preoccupations with the complicated pattern 'of dead and living' (Eliot 1969a, p. 182, lines 193–94; cf. Nolan 2019, p. 244). Their experience of living through the First World War had impressed them with the fragility of humanity and of human life, even as the collective experience of loss—the shattering and killing of an entire generation—provoked a cultural impetus to make some sort of sense of bereavement and grief. Arguably, Eliot refers to this when he declares that an artist's 'appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead' (Eliot 1945, p. 49). Eliot clarifies this claim as 'a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical,

criticism', and the presence of the dead and their influence on the living is declared to be 'that which we know' (Eliot 1945, p. 52). It is difficult not to see the shadow of the war over these words. As Morris remarks, '[t]he dead, we discover looking over our shoulder, have been touchstones in *Courage*, landmarks on the textual path that culminate in crossing the liminal passage into invisible contexts' (Morris III 1996, p. 216).

The invisible context of wartime bereavement is, as Farkas has noted, the loss of the future: the dead were predominately young, the mourners predominately their parents (Farkas 2013, pp. 197, 203–24). This theme emerges clearly in Barrie's wartime play *A Well-Remembered Voice* (1918), in which the spirit of a dead young soldier visits his father from across the veil that divides the living and the dead (cf. Dunnigan 2017, p. 161). According to Andrew Birkin, Barrie's foremost biographer, the soldier's manner is patterned on George Llewelyn Davies—cheery, witty, and hearty—and his visit is ostensibly to cheer his father up (Birkin 2003, pp. 276–77). As the play progresses, however, it becomes clear that the boy is frightened of being dead, as death is larger and stranger than he can comprehend, and he has returned to his father for reassurance and comfort. The pattern of dead and living becomes entangled as the father's sense of both his individual self and his paternal identity is dependent on his understanding of his dead son.

A burden of survival seems to have weighed heavily on Barrie's mind after George's death. He travelled to the Front again on an official visit in 1918 and was in Paris when the Armistice was declared (Birkin 2003, p. 279). He wrote to his friend Eiluned Lewis on 22 November 1918: 'By far the most memorable thing there was the happy faces. Everyone seemed to have changed permanently in a night, and what the faces, as well as the cries said, was "It is finished" rather than "we have won"' (Barrie 1918b, p. 125). Barrie associates the jubilation of the Armistice with Christ's moment of death. The reference is to St. John 19:30, when the dying Christ asks for drink and is given a sop of vinegar: 'When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost' (KJV). That Barrie would regard the war as a crucifixion—as the symbol of ultimate suffering—is perhaps unsurprising. After the fearful anxieties of the previous years, it seems unsurprising that the apparition of 'happy faces' in a crowd would linger in his memory as witnesses of release from suffering.

In *Courage*, the image of happiness mingling with the moment of death recurs with haunting urgency. Mid-way through the lecture, Barrie reads part of a letter he received from his good friend Captain Robert Falcon Scott (1868–1912), written as Scott was freezing to death on his failed Antarctic expedition. Scott wrote that 'it would do your heart good to be in our tent, to hear our songs and our cheery conversation' and explained they had decided to die naturally rather than kill themselves (Barrie 1922a, p. 32). After reading this, Barrie says:

When I think of Scott I remember the strange Alpine story of the youth who fell down a glacier and was lost, and of how a scientific companion, one of several who accompanied him, all young, computed that the body would again appear at a certain date and place many years afterwards. When that time came round some of the survivors returned to the glacier to see if the prediction would be fulfilled; all old men now; and the body reappeared as young as on the day he left them. So Scott and his comrades emerge out of the white immensities always young. (Barrie 1922a, p. 32)

The image of the young man appears suspended in the ice, still in perfect youth, hanging forever in the moment when pain gave way to death. This, too, is an image of crucifixion. St. Augustine describes the dying Christ as 'pulcher in ligno' ('beautiful on the tree'), and Western visual art often depicts the crucified Christ as youthfully lovely (Sancti Aurelii Augustini 1954, Ps. 44.3.57, p. 496; Viladesau 2008, pp. 44, 51). The theologian Richard Viladesau has argued that these expressions of beauty were composed 'in full consciousness of [crucifixion's] ugliness'; they are meant to emphasise the spiritual reality of an 'ugly and horrid' event (Viladesau 2008, pp. 10, 12, cf. p. 11). Barrie, though he does not dwell on physical horror, does not deny the ugliness and brutality of freezing to death in a tent or in

a glacier. Rather, he offers the image of the frozen youth and asks, ‘What is beauty? It is these hard-bitten men singing courage to you from their tent; it is the waves of their island home crooning of their deeds to you who are to follow them’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 33). There is no easy sentiment here, but rather a description of sick, exhausted men singing as they die slowly of cold and starvation, followed by a grim warning that the death of the young people listening is every bit as sure. This, says Barrie, is beauty—a ‘moral beauty’ found despite an ugly, even meaningless death (Viladesau 2008, p. 12).

The question which *Courage* hints at but does not answer is: what is to be done in the meanwhile? For those faced with the uncongenial bother of living—for those who, like Barrie himself, faced a lifetime carrying the weight of bereavement—which way should they follow on their slow marches? It is, in other words, the essential human question: what it means to be. To elucidate Barrie’s framing of this question, it is helpful to consider how Paul Tillich (1886–1965), writing a generation after Barrie in 1952, defined courage in his own lectures on the subject. Tillich also connects the nature of courage to the question of being, arguing, ‘Courage is an ethical reality, but it is rooted in the whole breadth of human existence and ultimately in the structure of being itself’ (Tillich 2014, p. 3). For Tillich, courage is an ontotheological response to anxiety, which he defines as ‘the state in which a being is aware of its possible nonbeing’ (Tillich 2014, p. 34). This is, he says, an ‘existential awareness’, not conceived in the abstract but rather as the visceral realisation ‘that nonbeing is part of one’s own being. [ . . . ] Anxiety is finitude, experienced as one’s own finitude’ (ibid.). Tillich describes courage as the triumph of the soul over anxiety.

Courage is the self-affirmation of being in spite of the fact of nonbeing. It is the act of the individual self in taking the anxiety of nonbeing upon itself by affirming itself either as part of an embracing whole or in its individual selfhood. [ . . . Such courage] must be rooted in a power of being that is greater than the power of oneself and the power of one’s world. (Tillich 2014, p. 143)

In 1952, amid the aftershocks of the Second World War and the threat of nuclear destruction, the limitations of ‘the power of oneself and the power of one’s world’ possessed an awful clarity. Thus, Tillich roots ‘the courage to be’ in the power of ‘the God above the God of theism’ (Tillich 2014, p. 171ff). This God is, he says, revealed through ‘the Crucified who cried to God who remained his God after the God of confidence had left him in the darkness and doubt of meaninglessness’ (Tillich 2014, p. 173).

On the one hand, this places the crucifixion as the generative source both of courage and of being. On the other, it restricts the cross within a concise dialectic of power, greater in magnitude than the earthly powers of the atomic age but not necessarily different in kind (Tillich 2014, p. 81). This understanding of courage appears to ignore the ugliness of the crucified body by equating the breaking and torture of the physical body with mental anxiety. Tillich seems to elide what Viladesau describes as the ‘purposefully paradoxical way’ of speaking about the cross, using the physical event ‘to rethink and expand our notion of the beauty of God’ (Viladesau 2008, p. 9). When read through Michel Foucault’s formulation that ‘[le] pouvoir s’exerce plutôt qu’il ne se possède’ (‘power is exercised rather than possessed’), the implicitly hierarchical structures of power posited by Tillich become more difficult to accept (Foucault 1975, p. 35; Foucault 1979, p. 26). Foucault, moreover, famously centres the body itself as the site on which ‘les rapports de pouvoir’ (‘power relations’) operate with ‘une prise immédiate’ (‘an immediate hold’): ‘ils l’investissent, le marquent, le dressent, le supplicient, l’astreignent à des travaux, l’obligent à des cérémonies, exigent de lui des signes’ (‘they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs’) (Foucault 1975, p. 34; Foucault 1979, p. 25). This litany of pain could be describing crucifixion, both as the political power of the Roman Empire enacted on a condemned body and as the pious paradoxes of the Church memorialising death by torture into sign and ceremony. Judith Butler, in her commentary on this passage, has written: ‘[p]ower happens to this body, but this body is also the occasion in which something unpredictable (and, hence, undialectical) happens to power; it is one site of its redirection, profusion and transvaluation’ (Butler 2002, p. 15).

When Barrie presents courage and beauty as the image of an eternally young man frozen in ice, he offers a paradoxical crucifixion which acknowledges the subject nature of the broken body while redirecting and transvaluing the site of power. For Tillich, the crucifixion leads to a redemptive embrace of ‘the courage to be’ because of its revelation of a divine power beyond revelation. Read against Foucault, redemption remains possible through the crucified body of Christ as both the subject of power and the revelation of courage through which power is undone. For Barrie, however, crucifixion is wholly unredemptive; it is the source of anxiety and doubt. The crucified Christ cannot redeem because death has rendered him beautiful and remote, powerless through an elation beyond the reach of earthly power. Beauty has boiled over, and ‘his fellows can never quite touch him, their best beloved’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 34).

This provides a significantly different reading than florid piety for Barrie’s definition of courage as ‘the lovely virtue—the rib of Himself that God sent down to His children’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 7). The plain allusion here is to Genesis 2:22–24 and the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, suggesting that courage is the helpmeet of God. It also suggests that courage is created through divine wounding, a tearing open and breaking off. The rending of God’s side is a scriptural allusion: the image recalls St. John 19:34, when Jesus’ side is pierced by the Roman spear as he hangs lifeless on the Cross. The God whose side is torn open—whose broken rib is courage itself—is the crucified Christ, *Christus Mortuus*, ‘quietly and absolutely dead’ (Earls 1987, p. 65). This, perhaps, explains why God is ‘in heaven, still’ with the beautiful stillness of the frozen youth. Perhaps it also explains Barrie’s strange comment about W. E. Henley’s ‘Invictus’ (1875): ‘Under the bludgeonings of chance / My head is bloody, but unbowed’ (Henley 2022, lines 7–8). Barrie quotes these lines then remarks, ‘A fine mouthful, but perhaps “My head is bloody and bowed” is better’ (Barrie 1922a, p. 36). This criticizes Henley’s scansion in this line (not incorrectly); it also commits literary vandalism, deliberately distorting Henley’s verse. In place of the grand image of an indomitable man facing chance bravely in the ring, Barrie offers the hanging wreck, broken in ‘the fell clutch of circumstance’ (Henley 2022, line 5), the bowed, bloodied head again evoking the crucified Christ. The lovely virtue is the gift of a dead God.

### 5. ‘Do You Love Me?’

Let me recapitulate the argument so far: In the years following the First World War, the pain of Barrie’s personal bereavements and the broader cultural experience of grief shook his aesthetic and philosophic embrace of Christian Humanism, rupturing the ‘inclusive dialectics’ which he had developed in his earlier works (Jack 2010a, p. 58). This is manifested, in part, through the presence of God’s absence in the post-war writings. Rather than Christianity being the ‘supreme principle’, as Barrie had learned from Masson (Jack 2010a, p. 56), God in Christ is at best helpless and at worst vindictive. In Act 3 of *Mary Rose*, God appears remote and uncaring, an image of distant judgement without offering redemption. In *Courage*, God seems benevolent but impotent, abstracted and concealed in the allusive patterns of the text. Thus, Barrie presents the image of the beautifully dead Christ, preserved in youth and innocence but suspended in an unredemptive crucifixion.

This reading of *Courage* presents another avenue of critical approach to *Mary Rose* (and effectively to Barrie’s post-war work as a whole). The absence of God revealed in the frozen crucifixion suggests a complete isolation of the individual, the inability of one soul to communicate with another, of God to speak to humanity, and of past and future to touch the present. Put another way, it is a failure of λόγος (*logos*, ‘word’, ‘reason’). This concept offers a lynchpin between Barrie’s work and Modernism. Joshua Richards, in his penetrating recent monograph, traces the concept of λόγος in T. S. Eliot’s early poetry as the presence of an absence. Richards argues that Eliot, through his studies in mysticism, understood that the ‘divine λόγος allows, with sufficient personal, spiritual preparation, for connection between not only the individual and God but his fellow man; sin severs this link which results in isolation’ (Richards 2020, p. 65). Eliot’s view derives from a philosophical synthesis of the Stoic conception of λόγος as the rational principle that



underlies the universe and the Johannine Christological identification of λόγος with divine revelation through the embodied Christ (cp. Richards 2020, pp. 82–83). Thus synthesised, λόγος connotes the essentiality of human relationship through intellectual speech and spiritual sympathy. It is both the essence of a well-ordered cosmos and the divine creative source of that order. The act of communication with another person, then, sustains the revelation of the divine Absolute, facilitating both the ‘bridging between subject and object’ and ‘between immanence and transcendence’ (Richards 2020, p. 82).

The absent λόγος is the presence of failure on both fronts: the cosmos is bereft of order, and humans are isolated from each other. Crucially, this twin desolation of chaos and loneliness is not presented as natural but as a travesty: order is expected, and humans want to relate to each other. It is, rather, as Richards notes, ‘an explicit omission of the λόγος’, isolating the individual voices of the poems within a solipsistic inability to communicate or make sense of the fragmented world around them (Richards 2020, p. 86). While this is seen most forcefully in *The Waste Land* (1922), the absent λόγος is hauntingly limned in ‘Gerontion’ (1920):

The word within a word, unable to speak a word,  
Swaddled with darkness. (Eliot 1969b, p. 37, lines 18–19)

The precise formulation of the absent λόγος is unlikely to have occurred to Barrie in those terms, nor would it be accurate to suggest that he was engaging with Eliot’s work directly. The underlying concept, however, offers a compelling explication of the complex nature of God’s absence in *Mary Rose*.

The absent λόγος can be seen most readily in the mother–son relationship between Harry and Mary Rose. When Harry first meets Mary Rose’s ghost, she is preparing to attack and injure him. Barrie’s letter to Whibley indicates that he seriously considered concluding the play by Mary Rose stabbing Harry to death with his own trench knife, never recognising him as her missing baby (Barrie 1919, p. 130). This act of violence is anticipated in *The Little White Bird*, where the novel’s narrator muses that the ghosts of ‘dead young mothers’ may ‘hate’ and injure their grown children: ‘How could the pretty young mother know that this grizzled interloper was the child of whom she was in search?’ (Barrie [1902] 2000, pp. 33–34). In the play as written, the confrontation in Act 3 takes a less sensational but arguably more poignant turn. Barrie shifts the emphasis of the play away from the mother’s failure to recognise her son to the son’s own self-recognition.

HARRY: Where is my knife? Were you standing looking at me with my knife in your hand?

(She is sullenly silent.)

Give me my knife.

(She gives it to him.)

What made you take it?

MARY ROSE: I thought perhaps you were the one.

HARRY: The one?

MARY ROSE: The one who stole him from me.

HARRY: I see. Godsake, in a sort of way I suppose I am. (3.530–37)

Harry has unwittingly stolen Mary Rose’s baby away simply by growing up. He is still her son, but he is no longer the baby she remembers. With this knowledge comes Harry’s realisation that he can never truly speak to his mother, lamenting, ‘But you don’t know what Harry I am’ (3.617). Harry could never speak with Mary Rose in the past because she had left before he was old enough to speak. Mary Rose cannot speak to Harry in the present because she only knows her son as a baby. In the moment of their encounter, the past interpenetrates the present—the parent’s memory of the child encountering the grown child’s memories of childhood—and yet neither is able to communicate with the other.

Barrie had used a similar scenario before: a lost boy returning home after a long time away, only to find his mother unknowing and unwelcoming.

PETER: [ . . . ] Wendy, you are wrong about mothers. I thought like you about the window, so I stayed away for moons and moons, and then I flew back, but the window was barred, for my mother had forgotten all about me and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed. (Barrie [1904] 1995b, 4.1.187–91)<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps uncoincidentally, this scene first appears, with significantly more detail, as part of the prolonged nested narrative in *The Little White Bird*, which introduces the character of Peter Pan. Here, Peter flies home only to find that

[ . . . ] the window was closed, and there were iron bars on it, and peering inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm around another little boy.

Peter called, ‘Mother! mother!’ but she heard him not; in vain he beat his little limbs against the iron bars. He had to fly back, sobbing, to the [Kensington] Gardens, and he never saw his dear again. (Barrie [1902] 2000, p. 127)

Critics have frequently noted the similarity between Mary Rose and Peter Pan (cf. Ormond 1983, p. 61; Hollindale 1995, p. xiv; Wiggins 2006, p. 99; Jack 2011, pp. 111, 115; Tibbetts 2016, p. 11f; Dunnigan 2017, p. 163f; Douglas-Fairhurst 2019, p. xlv; Nolan 2019, p. 232–33; Williams 2022).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Barrie at one time planned to give Peter Pan a cameo at the end of *Mary Rose* to suggest that the island was Never Land—a metatextual conceit he wisely abandoned (Hollindale 1995, p. xiv; Ormond 1983, p. 61). But Mary Rose is functionally closer to Wendy, the girl who flies away when called, playing at being a mother in an amorphous otherworld. Harry, rather than Mary Rose, takes the Peter Pan role: a young boy flitting out the window in search of adventure, returning years later only to find his mother has forgotten him. He is, perhaps, Peter Pan as he would become if he ever grew up—a ‘battle-weary soldier’ (McIntosh Forthcoming), sad and lonely in a world savaged by war and bereft of fairies.

Of course, it is Peter, not Wendy, who ‘is wrong about mothers’ (5.2.3). Peter Pan not irrationally regards the barred window as a manifestation of his mother’s forgetfulness. What Peter cannot understand, however, is that both his dream and the window bars can be equally true: the presence of his little brother and their mother’s protectiveness of him does not mean she does not still cry over her lost boy. Wendy’s mother, Mrs. Darling, who has lost all three of her children, persists in leaving the window open in welcome, enacting hope that they will return even as she struggles with despair. Mary Rose, too, persists in searching for her baby long after she has forgotten what she has lost. A comparison of these scenes demonstrates how the absent λόγος functions in *Mary Rose*.

When the Darling children fly back to their nursery from the Never Land, they find their mother absent and, for a moment, fear the worst: ‘Perhaps we don’t remember the old life as well as we thought we did’ (5.2.85–86). They quickly realise their mother is in the next room and so hide in their bedclothes to give her a surprise: ‘Mrs Darling sees the bumps [under the sheets] as soon as she comes in, but she does not believe she sees them’; she mistakes them for a dream and looks resolutely away, but, the stage directions comment, ‘of course they are still reflected in her mind’ (5.2.100). One by one, the children sit up and call, ‘Mother!’ Mrs Darling identifies each voice without turning round: ‘That is Wendy. [ . . . ] Now it is John. [ . . . ] Now Michael’ (5.2.103, 105, 107). The scene is an act of maternal reclamation. Naming the children as she hears their voices asserts her emotional and physical connection to them. Overwhelmed with the reality of her supposed memories, Mrs. Darling cries, ‘And when they call I stretch out my arms to them, but they never come, they never come!’ (5.2.107–6). The stage directions declare: ‘This time, however, they come, and there is joy once more in the Darling household.’ The joyful restoration originates both in the children’s decision to return home and in the mother’s persistent, loving memory. It is accomplished through speech, calling and naming, the words filled with an import which Mrs. Darling initially miscomprehends but which is made tangible when her lost

children run back into her arms. This is dramatic realisation of the λόγος. Words become flesh as her children snuggle close.

In *Mary Rose*, the attempted verbal reconciliation occurs twice, each time at Harry's initiative, but the λόγος remains absent, rendering true communication impossible. When Harry first meets Mary Rose's ghost, he attempts to stir her memory of his belonging to the place: 'You might have seen me in the old days—playing about—outside the garden—or even inside.' But Mary Rose cannot remember him:

MARY ROSE: You—you are not Simon, are you?

HARRY: No. (*Venturing*) My name is Harry.

MARY ROSE: (*stiffening*) I don't think so. I strongly object to your saying that.

HARRY: I'm a queer sort of cove, and I would like to hear you call me Harry.

MARY ROSE: (*firmly*) I decline. I regret, but I absolutely decline. (3.511–17)

Harry's identity becomes blurred with his father's before Mary Rose refuses to say the name Harry. The λόγος here remains unspoken. Harry's attempt to invite it only deepens the distance between him and Mary Rose. What 'Harry' means to Mary Rose is left unstated, nor does she give any reason for her objection. The implication is that she remembers Harry as a small baby and resents the name signifying someone outside her memory.

As their interaction progresses, Mary Rose reverts to increasingly childlike behaviour. This is perhaps a reminder that she was only eleven when she first vanished and has never really aged. Hollindale astutely notes the virtuosic challenge this affords the actor, 'with its recessive slipping towards the childlikeness and longing for play from which—if the part is skilfully acted—she is seen never to have fully emerged' (Hollindale 1995, p. 338). By the end of the play, however, she seems much younger, closer to three or four years old. Her behaviour also has eerie overtones of a sudden onset of dementia. Harry, sensing her weariness and loneliness, takes her on his knee and comforts her like a small child (3.575ff). Mary Rose cheers up at this, calling him 'Nice man', and so Harry again attempts to get her to recognise him.

HARRY: My name is Harry.

MARY ROSE: (*liking the pretty sound*) Harry, Harry, Harry, Harry.

HARRY: But you don't know what Harry I am.

MARY ROSE: No. (3.615–18)

Here, the word is spoken but only for its 'pretty sound', babbled like an incoherent child. There is no meaning or communication: λόγος again remains absent. Ironically, Mary Rose's long search is completed, but she remains unaware and unable to understand, alone in an unhappy child-world. Harry has found not maternal reconciliation but new bereavement and is left isolated as he attempts to lay the ghost to rest. It is, in a way, a fate more bitter than Peter Pan's; Harry first faces iron bars of rejection as his mother fails to recognise him and then witnesses even her memory of him fade into meaningless repetition. Harry has no memory of his mother, yet his spectral encounter with her allows him to observe her as she was in the vivacity and whimsy of youth and to accept her abandonment and its permanence. His bereavement is the realisation any grown child faces eventually: that the young, energetic woman their mother was will never return, that their parents have grown old and tired and will one day wish to leave them forever—when death is a natural and welcome rest.

At the heart of the play is Mary Rose's inability to understand aging and death. Since no time passed for her on the island, she retains a child's puzzlement over old age, even asking Harry, 'Would you mind telling me why everyone is so old?' (3.507–8). Her loss of a natural progression of aging has severed her from her family and from an understanding of her own identity. The effect is evident in an important instance of the absent λόγος in Act 1. When Mary Rose and Simon are celebrating their engagement, Mary Rose abruptly asks, 'Simon, do you love me?' (1.774). This is a startling allusion to St. John's gospel, when

the resurrected Christ asks St. Peter three times, ‘Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?’ (St. John 21:15–17). Mary Rose’s question is nearly verbatim with Christ’s, yet the answers of Simon Peter and Simon Blake are vitally different. St. Peter replies with heartfelt simplicity: ‘thou knowest that I love thee’. Simon Blake, however, cannot manage to articulate an answer, exclaiming: ‘Dearest—precious—my life—my sweetheart. Which name do you like best?’ (1.775–76). The actor has significant performative possibilities among the dashes; perhaps Simon chooses to answer with physical affection rather than words. The text itself, however, contains omission, if not outright evasion. Rather than responding by directly speaking his love, Simon absorbs himself in solipsistic emotional sentiment. The question has no verbal answer. Crucially, Simon’s non-answer ends with a question about Mary Rose’s name, offering unwitting admission that he does not truly comprehend her. The λόγος, both as understanding and as communication, remains unspoken.

The allusion also suggests an identification of Mary Rose with the resurrected Christ. This in turn suggests that her crucifixion is not her second disappearance, in Act 2, but her first, when she was a child. Crucially, Mary Rose has no idea it ever happened. Her parents and her lover refuse to tell her, which results, as Rosaleen A. Nolan has observed, in the ‘exclusion of Mary Rose from her own life experience’ (Nolan 2019, p. 252). Their deliberate suppression of the λόγος, though well-meant, not only rejects their own possible redemption but denies Mary Rose an understanding of her role as redeemer. Nolan correctly notes ‘the emptiness of [Mary Rose’s] words across the play as a whole’ (Nolan 2019, p. 253). Mary Rose appears, in effect, as ‘a word, unable to speak a word’ (Eliot 1969b, p. 37, line 18). Her restless, increasingly confused haunting of the house thus becomes a grotesque parody of the resurrection. She is a spirit without a body, an unspoken word without flesh. Moreover, her name also identifies her with Christ’s mother: the Virgin Mary, the Mystical Rose. Mary Rose, then, is simultaneously mother and son. She is both the mother who loses her son and the dead son received into his mother’s arms. Harry, too, emerges as both son and mother. He cheerfully describes himself as the Prodigal Son, who returns seeking forgiveness (1.75, et al.). After the otherworldly experience of his flashback, however, he becomes the mother who cradles her dead son. When Harry takes Mary Rose on his knee, they enact a gender-flipped Pietà: the grieving son holding the crucified body of the innocent mother, a *Filius Dolorosus*.

The absence of the λόγος isolates mother-son and son-mother from one another, even amid their deep emotional interdependence. *Mary Rose* is, in this sense, a profound meditation both on the solitary nature of grief and difficulty of emotional healing. In his commentary on this passage, McIntosh eloquently writes, ‘The dead need to be freed to be dead; the living, too, need to be freed from beyond death’ (McIntosh Forthcoming). In the absence of God, however, and without possibility of redemption, Barrie locates the ‘power of being’ in the body of the mother, which first contains the body of the son and then becomes re-embodied in the dual identity of the son-mother. Healing from trauma and bereavement is thus equated with birth. The recurring trauma of the room is described as its ‘nightly travail’ (1.248). This is yet another scriptural allusion: ‘travail’ frequently describes labour in childbirth in the biblical text, often used metaphorically to describe deep emotional struggle (see Psalms 48:6; Ecclesiastes 3:10–11, St John 16:21, et al.). Notably, it ‘can never be completed’ until Harry arrives (1.249). His presence is both the literal fulfillment of childbirth—the arrival of the baby—and the emotional resolution of the son-mother reconciling the mother-son.

## 6. Conclusions

After the bereavements of the First World War, the ‘inclusive dialectics’ of Barrie’s earlier work gave way to a complicated pattern ‘of dead and living’. Within this pattern, God is absent, the λόγος silent, the crucifixion is impotent, and the resurrection is incomplete. *Courage* suggests, however, that there still remains the possibility, however remote, of ‘beauty boiling over’ outwith time (Barrie 1922a, p. 33). Thus, Mary Rose, vital and alive to the beauty of life, is always the little girl who vanished and returned. Perpetually mother



and child, she is the crucified one and the mother of sorrows. Harry's emotional healing and the resolution of his family's trauma become possible when he acknowledges her both as his 'best beloved' and beyond his reach to help. Mary Rose is the beautiful youth suspended in the ice, stepping down from the white blossoms of the apple tree 'always young'.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The evidence for these friendships is abundant, but perhaps the most compact reference is the letter Barrie wrote to Stevenson in Samoa on 8 May 1892, in which he recounts a recent visit from Conan Doyle, who 'spent most of his time developing [amateur photographs] in the pantry' (Barrie 1892, p. 66).
- <sup>2</sup> The Latin is from the thirteenth-century poetry handbook, *Poetria Nova* (Geoffroi de Vinsauf 1924, p. 204, lines 224–225, my translation; cp. Geoffrey of Vinsauf n.d.). Jack's use of 'sed' for 'et' seems to be an error of memory.
- <sup>3</sup> Maggie Tonkin has provided an incisive overview of critical and biographical approaches taken towards Barrie's life and work (Tonkin 2014, pp. 259–81).
- <sup>4</sup> Further citations to this edition are given by act and line number.
- <sup>5</sup> This is classified in the Thompson Motif Index as E323.1 'Dead mother returns to see baby'; cp. E323.1.1 'Dead mother returns to suckle child', which has a significant number of attestations, and E323.1.2 'Dead mother returns to care for neglected baby' (Thompson 1955–1958).
- <sup>6</sup> The suggestion by Michael's cousin Daphne du Maurier that these night terrors were caused by Peter Pan is unsubstantiated (Birkin 2003, p. 124).
- <sup>7</sup> *Mary Rose* has tended to divide critical opinion; Christopher Wixson's illuminating study of the play provides a good overview of reviewer and audience reactions to the play (Wixson 2013).
- <sup>8</sup> This is based on my personal observation of being in St Andrews during a blizzard and almost everyone I met remarking that there had been hardly any snow for twenty years. However, for the sake of academic completeness, please consult Gordon Manley's 'Variation in the Frequency of Snowfall in East-Central Scotland, 1708–1975' (Manley 1978, pp. 1–16); the figures from Leuchars appear to substantiate the oral record.
- <sup>9</sup> The blurb claims to be from a fuller review in *The Graphic*, but I have not been able to trace the original article.
- <sup>10</sup> Further citations to this edition are given by act, scene, and line number.
- <sup>11</sup> Although Douglas-Fairhurst rightly notes the thematic similarity, his summary of *Mary Rose* as 'following the fortunes of a man who returns every year to an enchanted island in the search for a woman who never grows any older' is baffling (Douglas-Fairhurst 2019, p. xlv).

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