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Peter: Creator and Controller

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Peter: Creator and Controller
By Aileen T. Nguyen

This analysis of J.M. Barrie's most famous character and setting (Peter Pan and Neverland) posits Peter as an artist who substitutes art for the natural creation of the real world. Peter is driven to Neverland not so much by the desire for freedom as by the need for control. This need, and its fulfillment, is evidenced in Neverland, where the force that converts fantasies of the mind to physical reality enables Peter to manipulate the happenings on the island while maintaining the illusion of his existence. The pattern of his manipulation also puts into question the nature of Peter's single and greatest trauma (and the episode he cites as justification for his rejection of the real world): his abandonment and rejection by his mother. The analysis utilizes a variety of Barrie's texts, including *Peter and Wendy*, *Peter Pan: Or, the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*, *The Little White Bird*, "Neil and Tintinnabulum," and "The Blot on Peter Pan."

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Table of Contents

Peter: Creator and Controller

1. Introduction: History and Contextualization

The story of Peter Pan has proven a difficult topic of study for many reasons. The character of Peter Pan evolved in not a single work, but in several works published over the course of twenty-four years. Peter first appeared in 1902, in *The Little White Bird*, a novel written for adults. In the novel, the narrator (an aging bachelor named Captain W.) details the adventures of his relationship with a six-year-old boy named David. Several of the episodes revolve around the captain and David's adventures in the Kensington Gardens, where, with the ever-shifting fairies and talking flowers and birds, resides Peter Pan, an infant boy who flies out of his nursery and "escaped from being human when he was seven days old" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 158). The public reacted favorably to Peter, and J.M. Barrie expanded the story into a play (*Peter Pan: Or, the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up*), which debuted, with great success, in 1904, although the manuscript of the play was not published until 1928. In this theatrical revision of the story, Barrie replaces the infant Peter with an older child, and replaces the fairy-dominated world of Kensington Gardens with the more colorful, pirate-ridden world of Neverland. The novel, *Peter and Wendy*, was published in 1911 and closely follows the plot of the play.

The most common critique of Barrie scholarship accuses critics of focusing excessively on the writer himself. As Jacqueline Rose notes, "in point of fact it is too easy to give an Oedipal reading of Peter Pan" (35). Indeed, Barrie's biography and writings provide an attractive case for the psychoanalyst. In one journal entry, he writes, "It is as if long after writing P. Pan its true

meaning came to me—Desperate attempt to grow up but can't" (Birkin 297). Many interpretations have focused primarily on perceived links between the text and author, namely the oedipal nature of mother-son relationships in Barrie's life and works. When Barrie was six years old, his brother David (whom their mother had openly favored) died in a skating accident, just one day shy of his fourteenth birthday. The incident devastated his mother and profoundly affected Barrie, who spent a great deal of his childhood trying to help his mother recover and, apparently, trying to replace his brother; he describes how he often dressed in his brother's clothes and even once mastered his brother's trademark whistle (Barrie, *Margaret Ogilvy* 17). Years after David's death, Barrie wrote that, "When I became a man… he was still a boy of thirteen" (19). Scholars point to this statement to support claims that Barrie viewed death as a method of freezing a child in time and perpetual innocence. Scholarly attempts to impose upon his literary works meaning derived from his autobiographical works and speeches prove problematical considering his non-literary words cannot be taken at face value; in his dedication to Peter Pan, for instance, he insists that he has no recollection of having written the work (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 75).

A literary work does not exist on its own, and an understanding of a work is often enhanced by an understanding of its creator. However, as has often been the case with Peter Pan, excessive devotion to the author can lead to misinterpretation and a loss of focus. Valuable insight can be gained from approaching the works primarily as text, and not simply as the projections of a second and main focus (the writer). This thesis attempts to return to the text as the primary source for interpretation; facts about Barrie are offered minimally as support for the argument, but do not constitute the argument itself.

Peter Pan has proven a difficult topic on which to conduct scholarly research not just because of the attractiveness of the author's life story, but because of the lack of a definitive text. R.D.S. Jack points to no less than ten modes in which Barrie molded the myth of Peter Pan (as a hypothesis within an earlier novel, a photograph collection, an episode within a novel, a full-length play, a one-act play, a ballet, a children's story, a scenario for a film, a short story, and a speech) (Jack, *The Road* 164-165). Barrie steps outside the traditional boundaries of genre; in his plays he includes images which are not actable (for example, Mrs. Darling is described as one who enjoys sitting by her children and "tidying up their minds, just as if they were drawers" [1.1.77]), and in his novels he includes not only melodramatic moments characteristic of the theatre, but reproductions of visual art itself (Jack, "From Drama to Silent Film"). His refusal to content himself with the freedoms of one mode, his impromptu stagings, and his obsessive and plentiful revisions contribute to the elusiveness of *Peter Pan* as a text. While some of the impromptu acts served to allow the actors time to attach wires, change clothing, or set up upcoming scenes, some (such as "When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought") served no logistical purpose. The story lacks a definitive text, and in this paper, the term "Peter Pan works" refers to *Peter Pan: Or, the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* (the play), and to the novels *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy*. These works include the epilogue, "When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought." Although performed only once in Barrie's lifetime, this scene contributes significantly to the story. Described as "essential to the artistic shape and meaning of *Peter and Wendy*," it is also essential to the shape and meaning of the play, upon which the novel is closely modeled (Hollindale, *Peter and Wendy* 240). Therefore, although some productions of the play have regarded "When Wendy Grew Up: An Afterthought" as an alternative ending and omitted it

entirely in order to obtain a more optimistic tone, this thesis regards the epilogue as a part of the story.

In addition to these Peter Pan works, this thesis considers Barrie's "secondary" Peter Pan works: "The Blot on Peter Pan," and "Neil and Tintinnabulum," two short stories (published in two different children's anthologies) which revolve around the relationship between a boy and his godfather. The godfather (who narrates both stories) identifies himself, in the first story, as the playwright of *Peter Pan*. While the story's fictitious nature prohibits the assumption of the narrator-playwright as Barrie, the story's direct reference to the Peter Pan renders the story pertinent to the study of *Peter Pan*.

Conflict between the works has contributed to the elusiveness of Peter Pan as a text. Barry recycled and omitted certain events; the confusion between the thimble and the kiss, for example, occurs with Maimie Mannering in *The Little White Bird*, and with Wendy in *Peter Pan: Or, the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* and *Peter and Wendy*; Peter's maternal betrayal is depicted in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, whereas in the other two works it is only recounted by Peter; in the play, Barrie explicitly states that Peter cannot make physical contact with any character (1.1.356), but makes no such remark in the novel. Because of these abundant differences, many critics have approached the works separately, analyzing solely the play, or solely one of the novels.

Despite these differences, the consistent emergence of similar themes throughout the Peter Pan works suggests the presence of a core vein. Insight into the world of Neverland can be attained from regarding these works not as simply different stories, but as different approaches to a single story. This analysis attempts to do so, bringing together even details peculiar to a single work, in order to develop some sort of understanding of the nature, the governing rules, and the

philosophies of Barrie's fantastical world. In the tale of Peter's blot, a tale originally entitled "The Truth about Peter Pan," the narrator relates the origins of Peter's cockiness. At the close of the story, in response to one girl's question regarding the authenticity of the story, the narrator-playwright states, "It is not all true… but some of it, here and there" (Barrie, "Blot" 100). The story, which attempts to illuminate the nature of Peter's most defining characteristics, thus uses a fiction in order to capture a truth. A similar acceptance of obliqueness in approach can prove valuable. As Jack states, "The choice of mode is, for Barrie, itself an act of interpretation" (Jack, *The Road* 164). In regarding the various Peter Pan works as attempts to capture a single concept, one can utilize components of the work which arise from the freedoms inherent in each genre. Jack emphasizes Barrie's philosophy that one medium "must define itself mainly in terms of its differences" from another medium (Jack, "From Drama to Silent Film"). Thus a play must maximize the freedoms of the stage, and a novel must maximize the freedoms of the page. Certainly, Barrie reveled in the visual power of the stage and pushed technical effects to their limits (Green 73).

However, even the medium Barrie so loved carried restrictions; a play is restricted by the physical confines of the stage and the practical limitations of technical effects. He mentions these confines in the stage directions to the play *Alice-Sit-by-the-Fire*. Here the playwright expresses a desire to show the audience the contents of one of his characters' diaries. In the stage directions he considers the possibility:

> Then why don't we do it? Is it because this would be a form of eavesdropping, and that we cannot be sure our hands are clean enough to turn the pages of a young girl's thoughts? It cannot be that, because the novelists do it. It is because in a play we must tell little that is not revealed by the spoken words; you must ferret out all you want to know

> from them, although of course now and then we may whisper a conjecture in brackets… we are expected merely to present our characters as they toe the mark; then the handkerchief falls, and off they go. (qtd. in Hollindale, Introduction, *Peter Pan* xvi)

Barrie certainly takes advantage of this ability to "whisper a conjecture in brackets," and in fact the British critic J.C. Trewain complained that Barrie's plays "in printed form are often a trickle of dialogue through a forest of commentary" (qtd. in Hollindale, Introduction, *Peter Pan* xvi). The structure of the novel frees the artist from the constrictions of the stage and serves as a valuable tool through which Barrie can portray his fanciful ideas.

The constrictions of the page might seem less stringent than the constrictions of physical space, but the play nonetheless fills in gaps created by the novel, and cannot be excluded. Barrie's emphatic insistence on a lack of physical contact between Peter and the other characters, for example, highlights the reality of Peter's state of non-belonging by capitalizing on a central feature of theater: the image. An absence of contact between Peter and the other characters is more pronounced on a stage than on paper. Jack notes Barrie's "overriding concern for visual, aural, and spatial effects" (Jack, "From Drama to Silent Film"), and the play still contains aspects which are valuable to painting a more complete portrait of Peter and Neverland. Barrie's enthusiasm for making use of genre-specific freedoms supports the use of all the Peter Pan works as primary texts for interpretation of the character.

This analysis attempts to address the nature of Peter's existence as well as the nature of Neverland, the realm from which he is so inextricable. Hook's anguished cry, "Pan, who and what art thou?" remains the story's crux (Barrie 5.1.147). Before one can consider a character who figures so prominently in children's literature, however, one must consider the concept of the child.

In 1693, according to modern historian Penelope Mortimer, John Locke "published his 'Thoughts concerning Education' and invented the child" (qtd. in Townsend 12). This claim, albeit an exaggeration, points to a truth first proposed by Philippe Aries and now generally accepted: that the division between child and adult depends not on biology and age, but has morphed throughout the centuries as a complex function of culture and the times. In economically difficult eras, societies have viewed children as miniature adults (Townsend 3), and Philippe Aries, in an enormously influential study on the history of the child, claims that childhood did not even exist during the middle ages. Although recent historians (most notably Lawrence Stone) have challenged Aries' methodology and findings, his insistence on childhood as a social rather than biological construct has provided a path of study for scholars of children's literature.

As previously mentioned, the literary and cultural concept of the child as the embodiment of innocence has not always existed. High mortality among children in the past led to a time in which the infant "did not count" and so was not regarded with deep affection (Aries 39). The emergence of the child figure did not coincide with the emergence of children's literature. In England, economic conditions prior to the early Tudor period made the production of children's literature impractical. Almost all of the books produced for children before the seventeenth century centered on moral and academic education. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the dominance of Puritanism (which saw in children souls seeped in Original Sin) shaped the production of reading material for children; the books produced during this very expansive period of English history tended towards using scare tactics to convince children to engage in moral behavior. Even after the decline of Puritanism the mindset remained, and many groups condemned fantasy in literature as the source of immorality and irrationality in children.

However, with the seventeenth century, claims Aries, maternal "coddling" became less suppressed, and the psychology of the child became a topic of interest. John Locke's concept of the child's mind as a tabula rasa led to an emphasis of the importance of nurturing the child.

Peter Coveney claims that the child began to "exist as an important and continuous theme in English literature" only during the last half of the eighteenth century, with the advent of Romanticism (Coveney 29). Romanticism came about as a reaction to the Enlightenment, during which reason and logic were touted as the sole sources of authority and knowledge. This rigidity of thought led to a condemnation of stories about fairies, magical realms, and the impossible, and this strain of thought can be found even in fantastical children's literature; Mary Jane Kilner, in her foreword to *Adventures of a Pincushion*, felt the need to point out to her young readers that inanimate objects "cannot be sensible of anything which happens, as they can neither hear, see, nor understand; and as I would not willingly mislead your judgment I would, previous to your reading this work, inform you that it is to be understood as an imaginary tale" (qtd. in Townsend 30).

This rigidity of thought came to pass, and the Romanticism which followed saw an increase in fairies and magic within children's literature. The Romantic period linked the child to art, for "in the child, life asserts its spontaneity, without which there is nothing" (Coveney 17). An audience member in one of Barrie's plays lauded the play as a celebration of a time when "we were absolutely ourselves; it is then that we were original. No convention had moulded us to its type. We could surprise. We said wonderful things that no one had ever said before; we had something of genius about us" (Dusinberre 17). Barrie grew up in the wake of this era of Romantic thought, and traces of it underlie his works. Peter explains to Wendy that he ran away the day after he was born "because I heard father and mother… talking about what I was to be

when I became a man… I don't want ever to be a man… I want always to be a little boy and to have fun" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 92). The attitude of the time allowed society to embrace the idea that a child would want to escape the pain of life by remaining young. While Townsend maintains that children "expect and want to grow up," Hollindale asserts that "they do, but they also want to remain children, or at least to take up adult privilege on childhood's terms. This is the option that Peter offers, in perpetuity" (Hollindale, "Introduction" xxvii). However, while conceptions of *Peter Pan* regard Peter as a child who wants only to avoid adult responsibility, the context of *Peter Pan* provides the first suggestion of the possibility that Peter plays a more active role.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was published in 1865 (thirty-seven years before the introduction of Peter Pan), the product of an "irreverent generation" that lashed out against the didacticism of the Puritan approach (Dusinberre 69). Depicting a child who questions not only social convention but language (regarded as the high mark of civilization), Lewis Carroll's whimsical novel illuminated a fresh pathway for children's literature: "The author's right to dictate to the reader was a given of children's books until the advent of Lewis Carroll's Alice" (Dusinberre xvi). *Peter Pan* demonstrates a similar discounting of social edicts; the narrator is at once an adult and a child, and he addresses the reader alternately as a child and as an adult. In the work in which the character of Peter Pan first appeared, the narrator, a retired military officer, chaperones a child. Upon introducing the dynamic world of Neverland, the narrator says, "On these magic shores children… are for ever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 74). This use of the collective first person places the reader and narrator outside of the sphere of the child. Towards the end of the novel, however, the narrator exhibits a childish jealousy at Mrs.

Darling's regard for her children: realizing that Mrs. Darling would upbraid him for spoiling the surprise of the children's return, the narrator says, in childish retaliation, "I had meant to say extraordinarily nice things about her; but I despise her, and not one of them will I say now… For all the use we are to her, we might go back to the ship… Nobody really wants" (208). Not long after, he contradicts his statement with the profession that, "Some like Peter best and some like Wendy best, but I like her best" (210). By the end of the story, the narrator (and the reader, who is made complicit by the homogenizing "we") regresses to a childlike state.

This blurring of child and adult boundaries has drawn much criticism; Rose comments: "The demand for better and more cohesive writing in children's fiction… carries with it a plea that certain psychic barriers should go undisturbed, the most important of which is the barrier between adult and child. When children's fiction touches on that barrier, it becomes not experiment… but molestation" (70). Many critics side with Rose, but Dusinberre, whose study traces the history of the interaction between literature for children and literature for adults, holds a more positive view, citing the shift in voice as representative of "a transitional movement between the writer as authority figure and the repudiation of that authority" (109). Indeed, the relationship between child and adult has historically been, and still is, characterized by power. Kincaid maintains that "we think in terms of power… naturalize it, center it, idealize it" (8). By placing the child at the center of society and configuring it as the vessel of an innocence that must be protected at all costs (12), society (the collective adult) divests the child of power. The popularity of the Alice stories can be attributed to the fact that Wonderland's "Eat me" and "Drink me" provides a refreshing possibility for children who live in a society that has historically addressed the child primarily in terms of "don'ts."

The importance of power in the child-adult dichotomy can be seen in the *Peter Pan* stories. Popular culture depicts Peter as a boy who escapes to Neverland because he wants always to have fun. A close examination of the text, however, suggests that Peter's rejection of society stems not from a simple aversion to adult responsibility, but from a desire for power. The texts characterize Peter with cockiness and an overblown ego, but Peter's astounding capacity for role-playing and pretending succeeds in bestowing upon him a sense of control. The real world subjects him to rules and regulations, while in the Neverland he can manipulate himself and his surroundings to the extent that he creates for himself the illusion of near-total power. As the captain of his island and a favorite among the island's inhabitants, Peter seeks to be playwright and puppeteer of his own stage. As Carpenter states, "[Peter] is god-like. Indeed in a sense he is God-like" (180). Like the biblical God, Peter is, in a sense, immortal.

The question of time persists throughout the *Peter Pan* works. In the real world, a sense of immortality is achieved through the creation of offspring. Peter, who rejects this approach because it mandates a loss of ego and power (inevitable in the process of growing up), presents an alternative form of immortality: creation through art, the constant inhabitation of a single moment by a constantly-shifting self.

2. Peter and Control

Barrie's most famous work centers around the dichotomy of the adult and the child, the latter group being characterized chiefly by an egocentrism so singular in its self-focus as to render its constituents "heartless" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 166, 170, 222, etc.) The concept of child egocentrism and "heartlessness" refers not to a uniform selfishness in personality, but describes the tendency in the children to view the world solely through their own perspectives

and to exhibit difficulty in taking on the perspectives of others. At one point Peter reacts to Wendy's "death" with puzzlement rather than grief, and Hollindale points out that "the paradoxical quality of brutal innocence in his reaction enables Barrie to present an extreme instance of the 'heartlessness' which the children generally show towards adult emotional investments and priorities" (Hollindale 315). Barrie exaggerates this egocentric view in his child characters. Still yet unexposed to the realities of the world (a world in which the individual is not the center of the universe but one of many people, so indistinguishable from the others as to barely exist), Barrie's child is also indifferent to the feelings of others, most notably those of the adoring adult. Peter's need for control underlies the Peter Pan works and serves as the foundation for his embrace of Neverland.

Ignorance of real-world matters results in an innocently overblown sense of self which marks Barrie's children. As the narrator-playwright of "The Blot on Peter Pan" muses, "One may rob or kill… and yet not be so hard-hearted as to destroy the confidence of a child" (Barrie, "Blot" 98). Self-centeredness is not unique to Peter alone, and the narrator notes that "there is to children a rapture in being cocky which is what keeps this old world smiling" ("Blot" 100). However, Barrie takes this nugget of cockiness and need for control, and blows it up in the character of Peter. As the "embodiment of pride and power," Peter possesses an ego that does not permit him to remain in a world in which the natural course of movement (growing up) is accompanied by a loss of individuality, and thus a loss of power (Jack, *The Road* 191). The extremity of Peter's cockiness (for example, he congratulates himself when Wendy succeeds in re-attaching his shadow) is a prerequisite for, and a by-product of, his rejection of the real world for Neverland, a realm which places him at the forefront and center. In Neverland, "animals,

birds and fairies have different systems, all mastered by Peter; the games employ visual signs, sounds and music, all orchestrated by Peter" (Jack, *The Road* 197).

Egocentrism constitutes such a prominent role in the characterization of Barrie's protagonist that in "The Blot on Peter Pan," Barrie's narrator defends the injection of cockiness into the character (for Peter was originally a humble boy) as an attempt "to save the life of my young hero… the boy who doesn't have [cockiness] might as well be a man" (Barrie, "Blot" 100). Thus arrogance not only characterizes Peter and the child, but is the lifeline to Peter's very existence.

Hook's animosity towards Peter results from envy of the world-view Peter is permitted to hold. In trying to pinpoint the source of Hook's hatred, the narrator says, "It was not [Peter's] courage, it was not his engaging appearance, it was not—There is no beating around the bush, for we know quite well wfhat it was, and have got to tell. It was Peter's cockiness" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 176). Hook despises Peter, the narrator explains, because, "while Peter lived, the tortured man felt that he was a lion in a cage into which a sparrow had come" (176). Thus, while Mr. Darling lives in anxious awareness of his neighbors' opinions, Peter's cockiness, which is indicative of his youth and spurs Hook's animosity towards him, accords him freedom.

His egocentrism serves as the foundation for his rejection of the real world and his escape to Neverland; in refusing adulthood he refuses reality and the relative powerlessness that the adult is forced to accept. Membership in Barrie's real world mandates maturation, a process which constitutes a loss of individualism. Upon commencing the growing-up process (represented by his entrance into school), David's playmate, Oliver Bailey, rechristens himself "Bailey," dispensing of his individual name and adopting, instead, his family name (Barrie, *Little White Bird*, 313). Conformation becomes a matter of course; Mr. Darling, the only male adult

character residing in the real world, is said to have "a passion for being exactly like his neighbours" (Barrie 71). His loss of identity also takes place involuntarily. He spends his working days sitting on a stool, "as fixed as a postage stamp… so like all the others on stools that you recognize him not by his face but by his stool" (Barrie 1.1.115). So severely is he de-individualized in the professional realm that at home, "the way to gratify him is to say that he has a distinct personality" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 1.1.116). His attempts to compensate his ego impart a sense of ridiculousness to his character; having a constant need to be admired and affirmed, he competes with even the family dog and his own children for his wife's attention. His is a world Peter rejects: a society in which membership mandates a loss of identity and power.

Peter declares that he remains in Neverland because he wants "always to be a little boy and to have fun" (4.1.236). This decision, however, exacts a severe price: the loneliness of the eternally exiled. At the close of the novel the Darling household has been reunited, and the narrator notes that although "there could not have been a lovelier sight… there was none to see it except a strange boy who was staring in at the window. He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 214). In ending the children's adventure with a scene which emphasizes not one of Peter's many riches (freedom, power, other-worldly skills, etc.) but with his central lack, Barrie highlights the harshness of the cost exacted on Peter. The exchange of fun for eternal exile is an extremely disproportionate one, and a closer reading of the Peter Pan texts reveals the components of a more balanced exchange: Peter is forever excluded from humanity, but he lives in a world in which he holds an unparalleled status and exerts unparalleled power; in Neverland he is the playwright, director and star of his own production, and the god of his own paradise.

Peter rejects a hierarchy in which he cannot remain in power. In the real world, the child is subject to the strictures imposed by adults. Neverland is attractive to Peter in its reversal of this hierarchy: "In fairy families, the youngest is always chief person… children remember this, and think it must be so among humans also, and that is why they are often made uneasy when they come upon their mother furtively putting new frills on the bassinette" (194). Peter avoids this usurpation through his eternal youth, but in the real world, the hierarchy is an uncertain one; the child inevitably grows up and supplants the father. The child's competition with the father begins with the mere fact of the child's existence, as it lays claims on the attentions of the mother. On the night of Mary's labor, as her husband paces the streets outside their home, Captain W. thinks, "She will be a crazy thing about that boy for the next three years. She has no longer occasion for you, my dear sir; you are like a picture painted out… Poor father… to know that every time your son is happy you are betrayed" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 51, 53). Set in opposition to the eternally loving and supportive mother, the father exhibits a childishness that rivals their own progeny. The grown men who visit the Round Pond (a popular site for the sailing of toy boats) often play with "such big boats that they bring them… sometimes in perambulators, and then the baby has to walk" (150). In this depiction of juvenility, the father disregards the child in pursuit of his own entertainment.

Although the ideal mother is epitomized in the characters of Mary (David's mother) and Mrs. Darling, no perfect father exists within the Peter Pan works. Though not characterized as childish to Mr. Darling's degree, Mary's husband (who, tellingly, is not given a name) struggles to support his family and is, in a sense, a failed patriarch. In contrast, his son David "strikes a hundred gallant poses in a day; when he tumbles… he comes to the ground like a Greek god" (4). This glorification of the child continues throughout the novel. At one point the narrator leads

the reader through a tour of the Gardens, during which time he points out landmarks and their association with certain "heroes" like "Malcolm the Bold," a child whose famed adventures include falling into a well (143, 148). With David and his age-mates positioned as gods and heroes, and fathers depicted as immature, foolish, or failing, the status of adult becomes increasingly undesirable. Notably, in none of the Peter Pan stories are the narrators (all adult males who are emotionally invested in the child-protagonist) fathers. In the short stories, the narrator is the child's guardian, strictly set apart from the father. Mr. Darling, the only father figure in *Peter Pan* and *Peter and Wendy*, does not contribute to a positive image of the patriarchal figure. His behavior and outlook can best be described as childish, as can be seen in the exchange during which he and Michael try to convince each other to take their medicine:

> MR DARLING. … There is more in my glass than in Michael's spoon. It isn't fair, I swear though it were with my last breath, it is not fair.
>
> MICHAEL. (*coldly*) Father, I'm waiting.
>
> MR DARLING. It's all very well to say you are waiting; so am I waiting.
>
> MICHAEL. Father's a cowardy custard.
>
> MR DARLING. So are you a cowardy custard.
>
> (*They are now glaring at each other*)
>
> MICHAEL. I am not frightened.
>
> MR DARLING. Neither am I frightened.
>
> MICHAEL. Well, then, take it.
>
> MR DARLING. Well, then you take it. (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 1.1.235-245)

Michael's retort, "Father, I'm waiting," and John's earlier words of comfort, "Never mind, father, it will soon be over," reverses the hierarchy, placing Mr. Darling in the role of the

unreasonable child and the child to be reassured, and placing his sons in the role of the adult delivering reason and reassurance (1.1.238, 221). Depicted as childish, Mr. Darling "might have passed for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness off (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 209). The depiction of the central father figure as a power-hungry and power-deprived boy sets the foundation for Peter's choice of Neverland (where he exerts considerable control, creating the island and, in taking on the roles of others, manipulates its happenings) and rejection of the real world, of which Mr. Darling is a part.

In *The Little White Bird*, the growing up process is represented by Pilkington, the public school. The institution's grasp on the child is so unrelenting that the captain imagines Pilkington as an evil man who "fishes all day in the Gardens" for young children ready to be turned into adults (300). The narrator describes the transformation: "On attaining the age of eight, or thereabout, children fly away from the Gardens, and never come back. When next you meet them they are ladies and gentlemen holding up their umbrellas to hail a hansom… The boys have gone to Pilkington's" (300). As a social institution, the school system comes to represent the first step into the real world. "Neil and Tintinnabulum" depicts this entrance as startling and painful, necessarily resulting in a loss of not only a sort of innocence and sweetness of character, but of identity as well. In the first section of the short story, Neil, once a boastful and proud child (like Peter), enters a public school (reminiscent of Pilkington's), where he finds himself stripped of any rank. In Neil's early years at his preparatory, the narrator boasts, Neil had "cut a glittering figure" and maintained a status of considerable prestige through certain juvenile accomplishments and athletic exploits (66). At the public school, however, he approaches near-nonexistence; though he was once a "Colossus he was now infinitely less than nothing. What shook him was not the bump as he fell, but the general indifference to his having fallen" (67). In

merging with the real world (a step represented by the public school) he must first become like Mr. Darling on the stool, indistinguishable from the rest of his peers. Neil's eventual regaining of status requires significant work and stands in contrast to the ease of his youth, when he need only to imagine and the adventure (with himself as the hero) would become as good as real. Status in the real world not only requires considerable effort to maintain but is uncertain, a fact demonstrated by Mr. Darling, who strives desperately to maintain the regard of others and once boasts to his own daughter that his wife "not only loved him but respected him" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 67). As the only male adult of the real world, in the play and novelization of the story, Mr. Darling stands as a bleak display of the end result of the natural process of socialization.

In congruence with Mr. Darling's ridiculousness, the Peter Pan stories depict fathers in a negative fashion. In introducing the map of the child's mind, the novel first presents Neverland, an enchanting and colorful island with such attractions as "coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages… and gnomes who are mostly tailors… and princes with six elder brothers" (73). The narrator goes on to say that "it would be an easy map if that were all; but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the Round Pond, needlework, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative" (73). Fathers, here considered on the same level as the horror of murder and the drudgery of grammar, are thus placed opposite to the breathtaking world of Neverland. In the tour of Kensington Gardens, the father is first introduced in as a comparison of physical size: "we are now in the Broad Walk, and it is as much bigger than the other walks as your father is bigger than you" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 144). First characterized by their larger physical size, the father stands in stark contrast to the mother, who throughout the Peter Pan stories is a figure of adoration, warmth, and support.

The tour in Kensington Gardens brings up two actual fathers. The first reference describes to a tendency in children not to be troubled by strange adventures and gives the following example: “For instance, they may remember to mention, that when they were in the wood they met their dead father and had a game with him” (140). The second reference describes a boy named Malcolm who was “partial to adventures,” but is retrained by his mother’s widowhood; his father being absent, Malcolm fills the role of head male and suffers his mother to put her arm around him even in public (148). He spends his days with a chimney sweep who enjoys adventures just as he does. An accident one day reveals the sweep to be his father, and after the discovery, Malcolm returns to a life of adventure and no longer permits his mother to put her arm around him in public. In this depiction, fatherhood is shown as a position that precludes a life of adventure. Like the Mr. Darling who appears in the revision of the story, Malcom’s father displays an impulse to regress towards childhood. This tendency among the adult males points to a sort of deficit within the realm of adulthood, and a loss that takes place during the transition out of childhood.

Faced with an adult role filled by individuals who are either absent, deserting, foolish, or outrageously childish, Peter opts for a world in which he possesses and can utilize great power. His cockiness allows him to reject the world inhabited by his entire species, and to embrace the possibility of another world. His relationships with the Neverland inhabitants evince his delight in his own power. To the lost boys he acts as the stern, protecting ruler: “I am always afraid of the pirates when Peter is not here to protect us,” says Tootles (2.1.73-74). However, he demands from them subordination; the lost boys “were not allowed to know anything he did not know” and “are forbidden by Peter to look in the least like him,” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 113, 112). He does not understand the concept of twins, and so the twins “were always vague about

themselves, and did their best to give satisfaction by keeping close together in an apologetic sort of way" (113). The consequences of his demand for subordination to his terms, however, go beyond thought and dress. Access to the home underground is attained through hollowed trees that function as doors. Common sense would dictate that only one door for is needed to access the underground home, but Peter follows his own whimsical process for settling incoming inhabitants: "whenever new lost children arrive at [Peter's] underground home Peter finds new trees for them to go up and down by, and instead of fitting the tree to them he makes them fit the tree. Sometimes it can be done by adding or removing garments, but if you are bumpy, or the tree is an odd shape, he has things done to you with a roller, and after that you fit" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 3.1.28-30). Residing in Neverland thus demands a physical alteration, and the Darling children adjust accordingly; Wendy becomes rounder, while John and Michael become thinner (3.1.25-26). Peter holds sternly to his notion of door-fitting, and in fact only allows the boys to eat real meals when they have gotten too thin to fit their tree (135). This peculiarity regarding Peter and the tree doors is emblematic of Neverland as a whole; everyone (the lost boys, the Darling children, the mermaids, the stars, and later the Picaninnies) yields to Peter.

With an insatiable ego, Peter's exercise of control nears dictatorship. When his troupe awaits his return, the narrator describes them as "dogs waiting for the master to tell them that the day has begun" (2.1.73). This description recalls the tyrannical Captain Hook, who thinks of his crew as "dogs… socially so inferior to him" (Barrie, Peter and Wendy 188). Indeed, following Hook's death, Peter takes on not only Hook's appearance but his manner of speech. His crew fears even to send him a request in a round robin; their "captain treated them as dogs… instant obedience was the only safe thing" (206). Even in his absence his dominance remains. Curly expresses his desire for Peter's return "as if Peter might be listening" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 2.1.74).

He relishes his power in Neverland, and the Darling children's relationship to Peter is one of deference and fear, rather than total respect. "Do be more polite to him," Wendy tells John, "What could we do if he were to leave us?... How could we ever find our way back without him?" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 103). As they approach Neverland they realize they have no choice but to continue towards the island, because Peter has not taught them how to stop flying, and also because they would not be able to find their way back. They depend wholly on Peter. In the journey to the island, when the tired Michael intermittently falls asleep and plummets towards the ocean, Peter "always waited till the last moment" to save Michael, and "you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 103). In Neverland he can play the role of hero and savior in countless adventures; the island provides him with vehicles through which he can support his ego and exert his control.

As captain of the ship he barks orders which his mates (the lost boys) quickly carry out. His dominance is manifested partly in the children's ready submission to his requests, but it is demonstrated more tellingly in the children's restraint; the children must actively refrain from mentioning topics that might expose the fantasy of his existence. His embrace of Neverland denotes a loss of membership in the real world, but he addresses (more accurately, evades) this effect by convincing himself that he is practically like a real boy. On Marooner's Rock, when he declines to escape with Wendy by kite on the grounds that "it can't lift two," Wendy holds back her knowledge that his reason is invalid because he has no weight (3.1.173). The fact of his weightlessness is, however, a "deadly secret" and a "forbidden subject," and she does not confront him with the reality of his near non-existence, but instead suggests an alternative solution to the situation (3.1.174). The novel also depicts him as having an unusual weight: "he was so light that if you got behind him and blew he went faster" (103). While the novel does not

cite his weight as a subject of taboo, its inclusion of this unusual weight indicates a consistent portrayal of Peter as other than human.

The first novel in which he appears depicts not only his separation from the world but his desire to mimic membership in it. In the Kensington Gardens, after he leaves his home, he "[knows] he could never be a real human again" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 170). Desiring to take on the semblance of a real boy, he begs the fairies to tell him how actual children behave so that he can imitate these behaviors; he "loves to do just as he believes real boys would do," and treasures the kite he finds simply "because it had belonged to a real boy" (64, 20). Peter's separation from humanity—and his desire to paint over this separation—has been present in the story since its first appearance.

Indeed, Peter demonstrates an astonishing capacity to evade conflicts with his perception of his own existence. The realities of the real world (the powerlessness of adulthood and the finality of death) deprive its inhabitants of power, and so he rejects these terms. He instead approaches life and death as a game. When Tootles falls prey to Tinkerbell's manipulation and shoots Wendy, however, Peter is faced with a "death" in which he has had no part. His immediate response is shockingly evasive: "He thought of hopping off in a comic sort of way till he was out of sight of her, and then never going near the spot any more" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 125). This suggests also an ability to manipulate his amnesia for his own psychological benefit. This amnesia, which deprives him of a past, allows him to live in the present unhindered by time and sets his state of temporal freedom in contrast to Captain Hook. The island's chief adult, Hook is pursued by a crocodile which has swallowed a ticking clock and serves as a constant reminder of the eventuality (for adults) of time.

Neverland affords Peter powerful tools through which he can manipulate himself and his surroundings in order to maintain his (dubious) approach to existence. Perhaps the strongest of these tools is the potency of make-believe. The fairies that inhabit the magical realm of Kensington Gardens (Neverland's forerunner) live in this area of pretend: "everything they do is make-believe" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 193). Through Neverland's muddling of the line between imagination and reality, Peter creates illusions for himself and convinces himself of their authenticity. With Peter, the boundary between real and pretend has effectively been erased; the "difference between him and the other boys… was that they knew it was make-believe, while to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing" (128). This lack of a distinction blurs the line between his lies and his truths; even in his often extravagant claims of adventure, both he and his audience seem unable to distinguish lie from truth.

> He often wanders away alone… and when he comes back you are never absolutely certain whether he has had an adventure or not. He may have forgotten it so completely that he says nothing about it; and then when you go out you find the body. On the other hand he may say a great deal about it, and yet you never find the body. Sometimes he comes home with his face scratched, and tells Wendy, as a thing of no importance, that he got these marks from the little people for cheeking them at a fairy wedding, and she listens politely, but she is never quite sure, you know; indeed the only one who is sure about anything on the island is Peter" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 4.1)

Peter's position in Neverland is one of great power. While the lost boys and the Darlings come and go, he remains. In a sense, he belongs to the island, while the other children merely reside there. He relies more heavily on the island's fusing of truth and fiction, and one passage in the

play demonstrates the deference with which the children have learned to treat Peter's disregard for fact.

JOHN (*who would be incredulous if he dare*) Any sport, Peter?

PETER Two tigers and a pirate.

JOHN (*boldly*) Where are their heads?

PETER (*contracting his little brows*) In the bag.

JOHN (*No, he doesn't say it. He backs away*)

WENDY (*peeping into the bag*) They are such beauties! (*She has learned her lesson*). (4.1.100-105).

In this scene, John comes closest to any other character in challenging Peter's approach to existence. A broadside printed during one of the earliest productions of the play reveals John's middle name to be Napoleon, a reference to the historical icon of power and conquest (Beinecke). Indeed, as the oldest male Darling in Neverland he is the closest competitor for Peter's position as head male. Peter and John's first encounter consists of Peter literally kicking John out of bed. It is John who requests, during Peter's absence, to sit in Peter's chair. When the horrified Wendy adamantly rejects his request to take Peter's place, John retorts sullenly, "He is not really our father… He didn't even know how a father does till I showed him" (Barrie 159). The tension between Peter and the Darling males is manifested in an absence of contact. Throughout the adventure, Peter pays very little attention to either of the Darling boys and interacts with them only when necessary, or else when he is playing a game. He teaches the Darling boys to fly only at Wendy's request, for his main concern lies with Wendy.

When footsteps approach from outside the nursery, the narrator notes that in directing the shutting off of the lights and issuing the charge for all to hide quickly, John is "taking command

for the only time throughout the whole adventure" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 98). For the rest of the adventure Peter is the captain. In addition, while the Neverland is fashioned from the mental projections of children and is thus relatively malleable, John's presence alters the island just barely. A technique in a game for hitting bubbles with the head is declared to be "the one mark that John has left on the Neverland" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 141). This singling out of character and powerlessness does not extend to anyone other than John, and John's proximity of status to Peter (although clearly no real contender for the throne) arguably leads to his emphasized friction and ineffectuality in Neverland.

While John bears Napoleon's name, Peter bears Napoleon's position and image. The narrator says that he can imagine only Napoleon being able to obtain the kiss on the right-hand corner of Mrs. Darling's mouth, a kiss which remains elusive not only to her husband but to her daughter as well (69). After witnessing the Darling children's reunion with their mother, and the adoption of the lost boys by Mr. and Mrs. Darling, Peter rejects Mrs. Darling's offer of a home and of parenthood, and flies off, taking with him Mrs. Darling's kiss: "The kiss that had been for no one else Peter took quite easily. Funny" (128). Peter's connection to Napoleon is perhaps most clearly portrayed in the play. Following Hook's defeat, the script directs the curtain to rise upon a Peter who is "a very Napoleon on his ship" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 5.1.209). In the production, Barrie positioned Peter's actress in such a way as to recreate the image of William Quiller Orchardson's *Napoleon on the Bellerophon* (Hollindale, *Peter Pan* 321). The tableau generated not only production problems but bad critical reviews (Hollindale 321), but Barrie insisted on it because "the French commander posing imperially on the deck of his ship after he had lost any real power provided the perfect objective co-relative and therefore had to be maintained at all costs" (Jack, "From Drama to Silent Film"). The painting depicts a post-

Waterloo Napoleon standing aboard the vessel which is to take him to St. Helen, where he has been sentenced to exile. The painting shows the defeated emperor staring off to sea, isolated from the covey of officers behind him. The image highlights the solitariness of Peter's existence. He rejects the de-individualization of the real world, and in Neverland he distinguishes himself in superiority, but the end result is that he lacks the security of camaraderie and belonging. The analogue to a deposed ruler appears to be a strange one, considering that Peter has just defeated his avowed nemesis. However, Peter quite readily embraces this image of the bravely suffering hero. After a battle with Hook, an event which strands Peter and Wendy on Marooner's Rock, Peter claims he cannot fly the two of them to safety because he has been wounded. Here the narration notes that "he believes it; he is so good at pretend that he feels the pain, his arms hang limp" (Barrie 3.1.162).

An understanding of the extent of Peter's control necessitates an understanding of Neverland, which is depicted to be engendered by thought. A passage in the novel sheds some light on the nature and genesis of Neverland:

> Catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it… and these are probably roads in the island; for the Neverland is always more or less an island… It would be an easy map if that were all; but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the Round Pond, needlework, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative… threepence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on; and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 73-74)

The Neverland is therefore molded in part by the children, and when they arrive on the island for the first time, "they all recognized it at once… they hailed it, not as something long dreamt of

and seen at last, but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays" (105). They recognize the features of the island, including the flamingo which had been part of John's Neverland, the cave which had been part of Michael's, and the whelp which had been part of Wendy's (105). These features are all part of one single island, but the narrator goes on to say, "Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal… but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance (74). Neverland therefore possesses a simultaneous plurality and singularity, a paradox the depicted through the concept of overlapping maps. Neverland's dual nature is also seen in the simultaneous dependence and independence of its being.

The children, by mere imagination, bring the realm to existence. Yet, although they create Neverland, the land also acts independently upon them. The children arrive in Neverland "not perhaps so much owing to the guidance of Peter or Tink as because the island was out looking for them" (105). The layering of the mental map on the physical map, and the melding of the abstract and the concrete, characterizes Neverland. Conversion between mental thought and physical reality, demonstrated in Mrs. Darling's dream, creates the portal by which Peter "breaks through" to the nursery (69):

> [Mrs. Darling] dreamt that the Neverland had come too near and that a strange boy had broken through from it… In her dream he had rent the film that obscures the Neverland, and she saw Wendy and John and Michael peeping through the gap. The dream by itself would have been a trifle, but while she was dreaming the window of the nursery blew open, and a boy did drop on the floor. (77).

Just as the children's conception of Neverland engenders its creation, Mrs. Darling's dream of the other-worldly penetration conjures and triggers its happening.

The meeting of boundaries (of consciousness and unconsciousness) that permits Peter's entrance to the nursery during this murky stage points to a liminality that characterizes the nature of Neverland. Peter inhabits a similar liminality in time; his inability to hold onto the past or look to the future renders him a permanent citizen of the present.

3. Immortality

The passage of time is a constant matter of concern for Peter and the inhabitants of the real world. The first paragraph of the novel describes Mrs. Darling's reaction to a flower Wendy has picked for her: "Mrs. Darling put her hand to her heart and cried, 'Oh, why can't you remain like this for ever!' This was all that passed between them on the subject, henceforth Wendy knew that she must grow up. You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 69). The novel thus begins with a depiction of human resistance to the inevitable passage of time.

The form of Peter's resistance distinguishes him from the inhabitants of the real world. Peter escapes to Neverland, in part, to avoid the consequences of temporal progression in the real world. The "threepence for pulling out your tooth yourself" is listed as one of the milestones of real life, but Peter still has all his first teeth, a fact which Mrs. Darling finds is "the most entrancing thing about him" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 74, 77). The novel repeatedly refers to his teeth (135, 153, 181, etc.), constant reminders of his eternal youth. While Peter's existence as one of the living is doubtful (a point that will later be discussed more fully), he does achieve a sort of immortality. In the chapter entitled "Peter Pan," the captain begins: "If you ask your mother whether she knew about Peter Pan when she was a little girl she will say, "Why, of course, I did, child"… Then if you ask your grandmother whether she knew about Peter Pan

when she was a girl, she also says, “Why, of course, I did, child” (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 157). Thus Peter is made timeless by his status as myth. Hook does not possess the same timelessness: “In dress he somewhat aped the attire associated with the name of Charles II, having heard it said in some earlier period of his career that he bore a strange resemblance to the ill-fated Stuarts” (115). As Hsiao points out, this link to a particular period in English history amounts to a “historicization and additional literal contextualization of his person,” which opposes Peter’s mythological status (166). The ticking crocodile, which pursues none but Hook, further illustrates Hook’s inability to sever himself from the chains of time.

In a physical sense Peter reigns in Neverland unaffected by time. In a metaphysical sense, he lives passed on as myth from generation to generation. The Peter Pan works posit creation as the way to combat immortality. In the real world, the ultimate creation is procreation, the production of a child who carries a vein of oneself. However, in choosing Neverland, Peter declines the immortality of the real world in favor of another kind of immortality: that achieved through art. As Paul Fox notes, Peter, in taking on the identities of others, recreates himself over and over and becomes the perfect aesthete (23). Fox describes the decadence of the 1890s as a call for “Art for Art’s own sake,” and an attempt to “[overcome]… the atrophic power of time” (23). However, the immortality of procreation rests on existence through the continued progression of time: years after the Darlings’ adventure, Peter returns to the nursery and, finding Wendy grown up, flies off with her daughter Jane. Wendy comforts Nana, saying, “This is how I planned it if he ever came back. Every Spring Cleaning… I’ll let Jane fly away with him to the darling Never Never Land, and when she grows up I will hope she will have a little daughter, who will fly away with him in turn—and in this way may I go on for ever and ever, dear Nana, so long as children are young and innocent” (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 6.1.252-258). Peter’s

immortality, on the other hand, rests on continued existence through one moment; he has no concern for the future and an inability to retain a memory of the past. He holds off stagnation (the antithesis of creativity and art) by continually recreating his art, in the form of his varying identities:

> Barrie has produced a portrait of the fin de siècle artist/e, the creative role-player, the actor of his own drama who creates his moments as ends in themselves, simultaneously forgetting the past and creating anew each present moment. It is this conceit of the 'moment' when time stands still, in which the artist sees himself and the world of his making as all that there is and has ever been, that allows a transcendence of the atrophy that linear time enforces. Yet change and the passing of time are employed as the means by which creative sterility is avoided, affording to the aesthete new momentary stages on which to re-play his or her world and identity. (Fox 24)

This constant circulation of being is necessary for Peter to maintain the illusion of life, which is marked by movement and freshness. Neverland is depicted as a dynamic entity, full of color and movement. However, in Peter's absence the island takes on a more sluggish existence: "the fairies take an hour longer in the morning, the beasts attend to their young, the redskins feed heavily… and when the pirates and lost boys meet they merely bite their thumbs at each other" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 112). Thus movement that gives Neverland the impression of overflowing life is not inherent in the island but an effect of Peter's presence: "with the coming of Peter… they are all under way again: if you put your ear to the ground now, you would hear the whole island seething with life" (112). The island alters itself to fit Peter's wishes and becomes (in his presence only) the image of a land teeming with life, a worthy rival to the world he has left behind.

Peter's need to uphold the illusion of life, however, also gives rise to grave effects. While the boys and the Picaninnies "merely bite their thumbs at each other" in Peter's absence (112), evidence of deadly encounters between the two parties can be found in the narrator's introduction of the Picaninnies: "Strung around them are scalps, of boys as well as of pirates… in the van, on all fours, is Great Big Little Panther, a brave of so many scalps that… they somewhat impede his progress" (116). The disparity in level of hostility implies that Peter alone induces the friction between the two parties. In his need for adventure and constant movement, Peter orchestrates death on the island.

Peter lives in the realm of the moment, in which nothing matters but the art (as played out on the stage of Neverland) and the artist (Peter) himself. Fox aligns Peter with the ideal aesthete as posited by the decadent art movement, a central focus of which "was a concern with, and attempted overcoming of, the atrophic power of time" (Fox 23). Though free in the sense that he is unchained to the past, Peter's continuous existence within a moment threatens a stagnancy associated with death. Peter fashions a weapon against time through his taking on of various identities and his constant re-creation of the self.

This contained convection of movement and identity (which characterizes the very essence of Neverland) is depicted in the novel's opening image of the island: "On this evening the chief forces of the island were disposed as follows. The lost boys were out looking for Peter, the pirates were out looking for the lost boys, the redskins were out looking for the pirates, and the beasts were out looking for the redskins. They were going round and round the island, but they did not meet because all were going at the same rate" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 112). After the beasts "comes the last figure of all, a gigantic crocodile," who ticks ever since having swallowed a clock, and functions as a signifier of time (112). However, linear time as embodied

in the crocodile (the clock does not cycle eternally but will one day run out) affects only Neverland's chief male adult, Captain Hook. The crocodile is the "last figure of all," and in coming after the crocodile, the child figure (the lost boys) is posited as the beginning of the cycle (112). This positioning is accurate in the real world, where the child signifies the start of life, but in Neverland this placement is rubbed out by the fact of the cycle; a continuously rotating circle, with positions occupied by fixed players, has no beginning or end. The child's ability to perpetuate existence in the real world is altered in Neverland.

In the real world, movement occurs on two levels: within the movement of the cycle (the child grows up to become an adult, takes the place of the parent, and itself has a child who will grow up and continue the cycle), and within the players who fill the roles of the cycle (Wendy will be replaced by her daughter Jane, who will be replaced by *her* daughter Margaret, etc.). In describing the re-runs of the production of the play, Jack claims "the play was eternal and perpetual within [Barrie's] mind; actors might embody its creatures at specific points within an ever-changing story; audiences might come and go but artistic creation cannot be reduced to slices of time; it is perpetual" (Jack, *Road* 187). Such is the cycle of life in the real world, where death is inevitable, but where one's essence is carried on through one's offspring.

As Neverland's characters are essentially invariable, however, the dynamics on the island occur at one main level: within the movement of the cycle. This movement is thus integral to the function of Neverland; the narrator observes that, "the crocodile passes, but soon the boys appear again, for the procession must continue indefinitely" (*Peter and Wendy* 116). Peter is constantly shifting roles during the story of Neverland. In the novel alone, the identities that Peter takes on include: Captain Hook, a mermaid, the crocodile, a Picaninny, and Wendy. In adopting the roles of others Peter adds a degree of dynamism, and thus life, to his island. However, the circulation

of movement is mandated by Peter. While the island reflects, to a certain degree, the mental state of its inhabitants, it "belongs" primarily to Peter, its eternal inhabitant.

In the circular "escapist games of Neverland," conflict does not seriously occur (Hollindale, Introduction xxvii). In a battle against the pirates, the narrator notes that Peter, who is always the "determining factor in the end, has a perplexing way of changing sides if he is winning too easily" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 3.1.417). In approaching life as a game Peter removes from it the gravity and finality which to him makes the real world so undesirable. Thus his contact with the role of father must take place in the context of pretend. When his tendency to fuse reality and imagination renders the act too real, he seeks Wendy for reassurance: "he looked at her uncomfortably; blinking, you know, like one not sure whether he was awake or asleep… 'I was just thinking,' he said, a little scared. 'It is only make-believe, isn't it, that I am their father?'" (161). The levity of the game insists upon its players' adherence to rules. Thus the household underground resists mobility of roles:

JOHN. May I sit in Peter's chair as he is not here?

WENDY. In your father's chair? Certainly not…

TOOTLES… I don't suppose Michael would let me be baby?

MICHAEL. No, I won't.

TOOTLES. May I be dunce?

FIRST TWIN (from his perch) No. It's awfully difficult to be dunce. (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 4.1.64-73).

Peter lives in accordance with a "boyhood morality in which life is a game and 'fairness' is the central moral term" (Hollindale 318). During the Darling children's stay in Neverland, the only person who breaks his rules is Captain Hook.

In the events which precipitate Hook's demise, Hook breaks three rules. During an earlier battle, in which Peter offers to help Hook up the rock on the belief that uneven fighting grounds "would not have been fighting fair," Hook bites Peter's hand (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 150). The effect is notable:

> Not the pain of this but its unfairness was what dazed Peter. It made him quite helpless. He could only stare, horrified. Every child is affected thus the first time he is treated unfairly. All he thinks he has a right to when he comes to you to be yours is fairness. After you have been unfair to him he will love you again, but he will never afterwards be quite the same boy. No one ever gets over the first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it. (150)

The narration pauses at Peter's dazed demeanor, and when the focus turns back to Hook, Hook is shown swimming frantically back to the ship, motivated by the astonishingly sudden materialization of the crocodile.

Hook's second and third transgressions take place in the context of a single battle. While the "unwritten laws of savage warfare" hold that "it is always the redskin who attacks, and… he does it just before dawn," Hook launches the attack on the redskins first, and without waiting for night to let up (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 174). He thus disrupts the rhythm and order of the island. So stringent have been the rules of the redskin manner of attack that the narrator notes pityingly, "What could the bewildered scouts do, masters as they were of every warlike artifice save this one" (174). Thirdly, upon massacring the redskins Hook beats the tom-tom. According to the rules of the island, "if the redskins have won… they will beat the tom-tom; it is always their sign of victory" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 177). Hook breaches this tenet and in doing so

also takes on the identity of another. As punishment for his collective transgressions, the world of Neverland (controlled at some level by Peter Pan) sentences him to death.

While the glory of Hook's death is attributed to Peter, the device is external to Peter: in the play, Hook willingly walks into the mouth of the crocodile, and in the novel Hook throws himself into the sea, not knowing "that the crocodile was waiting for him; for we purposely stopped the clock that this knowledge might be spared him: a little mark of respect from us at the end" (204). In neither case does Peter directly inflict death, and in fact, in the latter case, the reader-narrator is almost more complicit in Hook's death than is Peter. After all, Peter forgets his traumas and has presumably forgotten Hook's unfairness in biting him; at one point in the play, Peter disappears from action, and the stage directions point attention to "the incredible boy [who] has apparently forgotten the recent doings, and is sitting on a barrel playing upon his pipes" (5.1.14-16).

Peter's amnesia, however, functions to protect him from the realities of his existence; therefore, while his consciousness directly forgets the offense, a subconscious force ensures that Hook is punished. Created by (and thus inexplicably linked to) the imagination of the child, Neverland responds to Peter, its primary and permanent citizen, more so than to the other children. Lethargic in his absence, the island stirs to life and blossoms when he returns; its generally-unfriendly inhabitants are strangely partial to him; the Picanninies, who gesture threateningly at the lost boys, refer to Peter reverently as the "Great White Father" (157); fairies who normally mischief sleeping boys merely tweak Peter's nose and continue on their path (132); the mermaids who mischief and converse uncivilly with the children have long conversations with Peter (140); even the stars work with him to lure the Darling children (101). Intimately linked to its prime creator (for Neverland cannot exist unless someone believes

wholly in it), the island works to serve Peter's needs; it frees him from time by inducing in its inhabitants a degree of amnesia, it makes more real the power of the imagination, and ultimately, as in the case of Hook, it serves to enforce his strictures.

Neverland's penchant for altering itself to fit Peter bestows upon him a great deal of power. In Neverland Peter concocts adventures and stages dramas, many of which are not truly real, but real enough in the mind of the boy who cannot distinguish pretend from true. In Neverland, the setting of the drama is easily changed; when the children want to hold a dance, they simply alter the time on the island. The narrator explains, "It was not really Saturday night… but always if they wanted to do anything special they said this was Saturday night, and then they did it" (161). In altering itself to suit the desires of a boy who recreates himself in taking on the roles of others, Neverland becomes the child-artist's canvas and stage.

4. Modes of Creation: Art and Motherhood

Most famous as a play, the story of Peter Pan has close ties with the stage. Even in the novel *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie utilizes a style of drama more closely associated with the theatre than with a text to be read. In the scene that follows the pirate's ambush on the Indians, the narrator describes the reaction of the children who are listening to the attack from their home underground: "mouths opened and remained open. Wendy fell on her knees, but her arms were extended toward Peter. All arms were extended to him… they were beseeching him mutely not to desert them" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 172). Hollindale cites this exaggerated, dramatic image as "an instance of Barrie's theatrical narrative technique. It is melodramatic theatre transferred to satiric prose. A moment of high emotion before the end-of-the-act curtain is turned into a moment of paralysed absurdity as an end-of-chapter pose. Here… Barrie mocks and ridicules the

grand heroics that he in part admires" (Hollindale, *Peter and Wendy* 236). Barrie does not remove the theatre's presence even in the novelization of the story, and indeed, the presence of the stage cannot be extracted entirely from *Peter Pan*. Neverland functions as a theatre for Peter's staged adventures. In Peter's manipulation of adventure, and in even his physical alteration of the players in his adventure, he exerts over Neverland a level of control similar to that of a playwright directing the stage.

The desire for power (a prevailing issue in the Peter Pan stories) can be partially resolved by the freedoms inherent in theatre. "Speak my own words, not yours, dash you!" the burgeoning playwright Neil cries in his sleep (in imitation of his playwright-godfather), and certainly, the theater serves as an attractive medium for one who desires to exert control (Barrie, "Blot" 90). Neil (who possess Peter's defining characteristic of cockiness) is drawn to theatre when "he discovered that acting was a way of showing off" (Barrie, "Blot" 89). The role-playing aspect of the stage allows self-glorification, and another aspect allows control; in the world of theatre the playwright plays an uncommonly powerful role, fashioning an entire a universe, designing its inhabitants, and manipulating the happenings of the story. Peter's inhabitation of Neverland allows him to accrue the benefits of both aspects.

Peter's command over the lost boys and the happenings in Neverland echo the level of dominance exerted by a "superbly severe stage-manager" (Barrie, "Blot" 94). When Peter and Wendy are stranded on Marooner's Rock, and an opportunity to escape comes in the form of a kite, he gives the kite to Wendy, declining to join her on that grounds that the kite cannot support them both. His heroic gesture, however, has no sensible basis: Wendy "has been told by the boys as a deadly secret that one of the queer things about him is that he has no weight at all. But it is a forbidden subject" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 3.1.173). Thus he has orchestrated an adventure, setting up

circumstances that could potentially lead to his own death. However, as an immortal, non-human creature, Peter cannot die. The excitement of adventure lies in his imagination of death, and as he stands on the rock he declares, "To die will be an awfully big adventure" (3.1.180). Neverland is but a stage on which he acts out the adventures that collectively constitute his existence, and the danger he creates for himself is never quite real; Neverland, as always, comes to his rescue. A Neverland bird happens by before the tide can submerge the rock, and he escapes by using her nest as a boat. In this particular adventure he creates a brush with death and gives himself the role of a chivalrous martyr.

Just as remarkable as Peter's level of control is his protean nature, which enables him to constantly role-play. While all characters (except, arguably, Mrs. Darling) engage in role-playing, Peter engages himself to a higher level than do any of the other characters. He takes on Hook's voice, tricks the pirates by imitating the ticking of the crocodile, dons Wendy's cloak and takes his place on the mast. Rejecting the real world and its adult terms (growing up, which results in a muting of power and identity), Peter constructs Neverland as his stage and takes on identity after identity.

"The Blot on Peter Pan," a short story narrated by a man who claims to be the playwright of *Peter Pan*, ties the artistic achievement of the stage to the ego which so strongly characterizes Peter. In the story, the playwright-narrator explains to a group of children that Peter had been created as a humble, "noble youth," but was altered when the narrator's godson demonstrates for him the value of cockiness (82). The narrator explains that during christenings, fairies endow children with good qualities, while the fairy whom the parents forgot to invite counters these gifts with a blot on the child's character. Neil's blot, arrogance, serves him well, however. He comes to the realization that "acting was a way of showing off" (89). He cannot read or write,

but with the use of a rebus he upstages the playwright on the opening night of "Peter Pan" by performing a play of his own (89). Illiterate, prideful, and unwilling to take a backseat to the adult, Neil is a "mythic recreation of Pan, who destroys Pan's original creator by re-defining the dramatic character in a superior code… In the Never Land he issued commands with the certainty of the Stage Director which, in a real sense, he is" (Jack, *Road* 191). Following his one-act play Neil comes onto the stage and "made his bow amid a hurricane of idolatry" (92). Wielding power and commanding praise and laudation, he is god-like; through the theater, he emerges victorious over the adult. The stage becomes an apt medium for exerting control, and the actor and playwright become figures to be envied.

Following Neil's success, the playwright revises his work and blots Peter's character with arrogance. The playwright concedes that the "bad" fairy "performs in her imperfect way a public function, for if you were entirely good there would be no story in you" (86). Indeed, Hook's hatred of Peter, which drives much of the "story," results not simply from the fact that Peter cut off Hook's arm; even this fact "and the increased insecurity of life to which it led, owing to the crocodile's pertinacity, hardly account for a vindictiveness so relentless and malignant. The truth is that there was a something about Peter which goaded the pirate captain to frenzy. It was not his courage, it was not his engaging appearance… It was Peter's cockiness" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 176). The source of the "story" of Peter Pan, then, lies in this core trait. Here the playwright-narrator points to cockiness, which had accorded Neil such success in his debut, as essential to Peter's life.

Neverland's theatrical quality provides an additional measure of security for Peter; in the confines of a stage, all that takes place is somewhat controlled. As in the case with games, acting mandates a removal of reality. Neverland is therefore marked by an incredible level make-

believe, and in the play, the lost boys dress in "skins of animals they think they have shot;" they are, quite literally, clothed in pretend. Only in a theatrical realm, in which the medium mandates a suspension of belief, can Peter convince himself of the authenticity of his existence. On the stage, imitation is glorified to the level of the real. The narrator-playwright introduces Neil to coconut shell props, which the stagehands use to imitate thunder. This simulation of natural phenomena so entrances Neil that he steals the shells. The applause Neil receives from his rebus-play is, however, "louder than the thunder" (Barrie, "Blot" 97). In imitating his godfather and following his footsteps ("always to do the same what godfather does was a motto [Neil] invented" [89]), he has transcended the limitations of imitation. Peter, who declines reality for fantasy, relies on imitation to glean substance, and Neverland's blurring of the boundary between reality and imagination allows for Peter an arena in which his substitution (Neverland) can be viewed on par with the original (the real world).

The stage provides Peter with an additional security; in the real world, second chances do not exist, and human choice is irreversible. Peter has rejected the world, which forever bars from re-entry: "how differently we should all act at the second chance. But… there is no second chance, not for most of us" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 208). On the stage, however, devastating action can be reversed. At the circus, a sausage-loving clown who runs out of sausages places a dog in the sausage-making machine, the end result (a string of new sausages) sending David into tears. Captain W. arranges to bring David to the clown's house in order to rectify the situation. There, the clown places a string of sausages into the sausage-making machine, which then produces a dog, reversing the perceived damage and appeasing the traumatized child. A similar reversal forms the plot of Neil's one-act play. The children are horrified to learn that Aunt Kate (like the clown, an adult) has swallowed their goldfish. Weeping, they condemn her to death. A

doctor appears, and under his instruction, the goldfish slip out of her mouth and back into the bowl, reversing her crime, erasing its horror, and mollifying the children. The magical realm (Neverland and its forerunner, Kensington Gardens) to which Peter escapes also displays the possibility of reversal, and Peter can take on and discard multiple identities in succession. These realms normalize the shifting of reality as an approach to existence; "everything [fairies] do is make-believe," and to resolve problems and conflicts these same fairies resort to transformation (altering themselves or the other party) (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 193, 191, 231). Yet, while they delight in transforming people into objects, their conversions are not permanent, a fact which brings relief and comfort to the child David, who can then take pleasure in practicing the fairy incantations (272).

In the episodes with the goldfish and the sausage, the adult is the transgressor, and in each story, the transgression is perceived death. The crime is undone by the re-production of the formerly deceased; that is, a bringing back to life. The crime, then lies in the introduction, by the adult, of death. "The clown had done it," Captain W. recounts, "that man of whom [David] expected things so fair" (286). This introduction of death constitutes the breach of contract between adult and child. Barrie's world holds the mother figure (who embodies unconditional love and support) to particularly high expectations. The narrator of *The Little White Bird* decries the mother who is "false to the agreement [she] signed when [she] got the boy"; he maintains that "the God to whom little boys say their prayers has a face very like their mother's" (7), and thus equates the devastation of a child's loss of faith in the mother (the symbol of security) to loss of faith in one's god.

Peter lays his rejection of the real world on the female adult's supposed treachery; he tells 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, *Peter Pan* 4.1.187-191). The pattern of transgressions within the Peter Pan texts, however, locates the trauma not in a single instance of maternal abandonment, but in an exposure to death, the ultimate (and irreversible) abandonment. A later section will address the question of the legitimacy of Peter's claims.

The theme of the stage is immediately introduced within the Peter Pan works. In *The Little White Bird*, the captain interjects himself subtly and silently into Mary's life. When Mary and her boyfriend separate, the captain orchestrates (behind the scenes) their reunion; he surreptitiously drops a letter where he knows her boyfriend will find it, and predicts, correctly, that the man will go to the post office to send the letter. When Mary pawns treasured possessions in order to support her family, the captain buys the items and returns them to her. His actions, entirely anonymous until she finds him out, are those of a puppeteer working behind the scenes, delighting in his power to manipulate events and situations. Peter enjoys a similar degree of control. In *Peter Pan* and *Peter and Wendy*, the Darling children first appear re-enacting their own births. "We are doing an act; we are playing at being you and father," John tells Mrs. Darling (Barrie 1.1.88-89). Their games in Neverland are an expanded form of the game they play in the nursery; the games of pretend permit the children to practice taking on the roles they will inevitably adopt in adulthood. Wendy's games, being "imitations of a life she can expect," permit a "possible continuum from childhood to maturity" and allow her to light-heartedly try out the role that she will ultimately adopt (Hollindale, *Peter Pan* xiii). Wendy enters Neverland as a little mother, and upon building a house around her, the boys (her brothers, the lost boys, and Peter) knock on the door, prepare themselves nervously to make a good first impression, and

meet her again, this time as her children. Neverland allows Wendy to take the concept of "playing house" to an extreme. Like Mrs. Darling, who does not confront her husband about his faults and in fact actively covers them up for him, Wendy lauds Peter as a father and covers up the imperfections in his thinking.

Peter, however, remains in a state of constant role-playing, because "to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 128). This distinction gives rise to a subtle but clear tension between his make-believe and the make-believes of others. When Peter demands a doctor for the fallen Wendy, Slightly obliges him, putting on John's hat and taking on the role of a doctor. However, anxiety, instead of the levity that usually characterizes children's play, characterizes Slightly's make-believe. After prescribing a cure and passing Peter's approval, Slightly returns the hat to John and "blew big breaths, which was his habit on escaping from a difficulty" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 129). The "difficulty" that gives rise to his nervousness derives from an understanding that this act of playing doctor means more to Peter, a differentiation with which Slightly (who, like all of the other characters, does not totally understand Peter's existence) is unable to negotiate. The children willingly pretend only to a certain extent and are forced to stretch their normal level of pretence in order to accommodate Peter. He compels them, for example, to eat pretend meals. They understand the meal is pretend, but "make-believe was so real to [Peter] that during a meal of it you could see him getting rounder" (135). This unnatural assimilation of real and pretend "troubled them," and only occasionally and very subtly do any of them dare to challenge Peter's peculiarly urgent need to equalize reality and fantasy (128).

Peter's need derives, in part, from the nature of his role-playing. While all the children of Neverland engage in role-playing, Peter's tendency to take on the identities of others differs in

nature from that of his Neverland cohabiters. The Darlings willingly recreate an image of domesticity in Neverland (despite having gone there to escape the drudgery of domesticity in the real world) because in the fantastical world of Neverland, these roles are not real. Thus for Wendy, Neverland "is a game come true… [she] can try out the game of humouring the fallible adult male before [she] must confront the reality" (Hollindale, *Peter Pan* xi-xii). Wendy's role-playing allows her to test out a role that she will inevitably take on. For her and the other children, make-believe is temporary; at the close of the play, the Darling children and the lost boys return to civilization. Peter, however, who will never live the domestic life, engages in role-playing that takes on a different function from that of the other children. Like the pretending of other children, his role-playing enables him to extract and discard the gravity from an otherwise responsibility-laden role. However, the other children will eventually take on these roles, while he will not; thus, while their role-playing amounts to practice, his amounts to substitution. Though trapped in the liminality of Neverland, Peter simulates the movement of life in his re-creation of his identity.

The presence of the theatre prevails in *Peter Pan*, but Jack points out that the main characters in Neverland are marked by distinctive artistic strengths: Peter is associated with drama, Wendy with narrative, and Hook with poetry (Jack, *The Road* 297). The distinctions between the artistic modes form the basis for these separations. Peter's rejection of the written word may at first appear to figure curiously in a story that relies so heavily on narration; he is "the only boy on the island who could neither write nor spell; not the smallest word. He was above all that sort of thing" (*Peter and Wendy* 137). However, a key difference between the stage and the written word lies in the fact that the latter requires an additional phase of encoding, in which language is made solid. Retrieval of meaning then requires decipherment. John Locke and

Jean-Jacques Rousseau viewed these additional steps (forced into being by the arbitrariness of language) as a contamination of communication, creating greater distance between the individual and the meaning. Children's literature "has never completely severed its links with a philosophy which sets up the child as a pure point of origin in relation to language," and Rousseau and Locke look to the child as the entities closest to this "pure point of origin" (Rose 8). Locke's view of language as imperfect, and Rousseau's view of language as deteriorated, suggest "the possibility of some perfect, or original and uncontaminated form of expression" (47). The story "The Blot on Peter Pan" offers the theater as a mode of producing art while circumventing language. The child Neil (Peter's real-world parallel), who knows only letters and cannot read or write, employs a rebus to construct a play and upstages the playwright on the opening night of *Peter Pan*. His manuscript utilizes letters, but not words: "Y U 8 M U N T K 8 Y Y Y" reads, "Why you ate 'em, you Auntie Kate, why, why, why?" (93, 96). His triumph over the written word (a feature of the real world) serves as a template for Peter; here the child bypasses the adult terms and conditions and usurps the adult's glory.

Barrie's works constantly consider the power of the word. As Peter crosses the forest to save the captive Wendy, "He regretted… that he had given the birds of the island such strange names that they are very wild and difficult of approach" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 185-186). Here, the very process of naming creates character. "The Blot on Peter Pan" displays a similar concept when the narrator tells the children, "For the first month after you're born it doesn't matter if you're good or bad, because in the eyes of the law you are only a bundle without a name" (83). *The Little White Bird* also evinces the power of the word as a tool for creating art. The narrator, a lonely bachelor, utilizes story-telling to maintain his hold on the boy David. When an older boy draws David's attention away from the narrator, he devises a strategy to

regain David's notice. "With wrecked islands I did it," the captain says proudly, referring to a process of story-telling in which he places the boys in their own adventure story (always taking place on an island) and narrates their exploits (304).

In *Peter Pan* and *Peter and Wendy*, the power of narration is given to Wendy. Recruited by Peter to come to Neverland in order to tell stories to the lost boys, Wendy neatly enfolds life into stories that convey hope through their neat presentation of a beginning and a (happy) ending. Hsiao claims that, "Stories, like children's make-believe games, are disjointed from the continuity of real life, but exist, like the games, as whole narratives unto themselves" (163). Like the games of role-playing in Neverland, the stories serve to remove reality and gravity from life. Peter's lack of narrative power can perhaps be attributed to fact that "the ability to recognize narratives is also the ability to recognize beginnings and ends" (Hsiao 163). Peter, whose life is a succession of overlapping adventures, cannot demonstrate this ability. During the flight to Neverland, "he would come down laughing over something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 104). His mind being constantly refreshed by his amnesia, he has little concept of context, of a beginning or an end. His condition becomes striking when considered in relation to death, which Hsiao calls the "ultimate end-of-narrative" (166). The inhabitation of the present, which muddles his understanding of beginnings and ends in narratives, protects him from understanding the course of real life. In telling the boys the story of Cinderella (a story which he acquires by eavesdropping outside the Darling nursery), he recounts only the beginning. Wendy provides him with the end: "Peter, he *found* (emphasis added) her and they were happy ever after" (Barrie 1.1.486). The optimism permitted (indeed, expected) in the narrative conclusion

accords the children a sense of security and, as is the case of Cinderella, a sense of hope. The lost boys are children who are "not claimed" within the week after they fall out of their prams, and, like Peter, are deprived of a family to which they might belong (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 1.1.445). The tour of Kensington Gardens points to the security provided by the real world: "Often… you are lost, but there is another little wooden house near here, called the Lost House, and so you tell the man that you are lost and then he finds you" (*Little White Bird* 146). As inhabitants of Neverland, the "lost" boys are in a perpetual state of non-belonging, and only in narrative can they imagine themselves as found.

On the pirate ship, Wendy is accorded continuity of speech. "Silence all," calls Hook, "for a mother's last words to her children" (*Peter and Wendy* 192). In contrast, Hook, the cultured man who "has as Thesaurus in his cabin, and is no mean performer on the flute," fails in his attempt at to compose his final words: "Some disky spirit compels me now to make my dying speech, lest when dying there may be no time for it. All mortals envy me, yet better perhaps for Hook to have had less ambition! O fame, fame, thou glittering bauble, what if the very—(*Smee, engrossed in his labours at the sewing-machine, tears a piece of calico with a rending sound…*)" (*Peter Pan* 4.1.257, 5.1.41-44). He later continues his soliloquy, but "another rending of the calico disturbs him, and he has a private consultation with Starkey, who turns him round and evidently assures him that all is well. The peroration of his speech is nevertheless for ever lost" (5.1.55-58). Deprived of the dignity of a full last speech, his last words in the play are, "*Floreat Etona*," a proudly reference to the school whose values he has internalized.

In conjunction with Hook's Etonian past, the evidence of schooling in the other characters highlights Peter's lack of education. In the play, stage directions state that "John's attempts to fly go to no avail, "though he knows the names of all the counties in England and

Peter does not know one" (Barrie 1.1.34-35). A similar distinction is made in the novel, when the narrator observes that the Darling boys could not master flight, "even though Michael was in words of two syllables, and Peter did not know A from Z" (100). The particularities of language, mastered through schooling, are depicted as affairs of the real world, irrelevant to Neverland.

As a fixture of the educational system, grammar becomes a byproduct and symbol of the civilizing process children must undergo; in describing the tedium of the real world, the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* mentions, alongside visits to the doctor and dentist, "verbs that take the dative" (Barrie 99). Accordingly, grammatical mistakes occur within the Neverland, the realm Peter has created to replace the real world. One of the lost boys remarks, "I just saw a wonderfuller thing," and in introducing the island, the narrator states, "Feeling that Peter was on his way back, the Neverland had again woke into life. We ought to use the pluperfect and say wakened, but woke is better and was always used by Peter" (122, 112). Separation from civilization is thus evinced by inaccuracies of language. Tellingly, Michael's first encounter with the magic of Neverland displays this disintegration of language: "I flewed!" he shouts in delight (100). When Wendy grows too old to go to Neverland, her daughter's youth is highlighted by the verbal blunder in her question, "Everybody grows up and dies except Peter, doesn't they?" (Barrie, 6.1.84). Set opposite to Wendy, who, as an adult, has securely fastened herself to the real world, Jane demonstrates her inhabitation (as a child) of a more flexible state of being. At the close of the play, she flies off to Neverland while Wendy remains behind.

In "Neil and Tintinnabulum," Neil's entrance into the public school system marks the beginning of his growing-up process. Once a cocky boy certain of his starring role in the world, Neil finds himself "now infinitely less than nothing" ("Neil and Tintinnabulum" 67). He gains his first hint of status through his ability to teach a schoolmate the Latin word for "bell,"

"tintinnabulum" (71). Rechristened "Tintinnabulum," his Latinate name refers to his present self (the child transitioning to the real world), whereas his original name, Neil, refers to his earlier self (the innocent child). As his godfather notes, "he had to refashion himself on a harsher model" (67). So opposed are the two identities that the child and his godfather begin to refer to them separately; speaking of the accomplishments of his younger self, he concedes, "Pretty decent of him… I didn't think he had it in him" (84).

In preparing for his entrance into the public school he had naively brought with him the trophies of his childhood (a much-coveted belt that he had won, and evidence of an impressive cricket game in which he had scored "twenty-six against Juddy's" [66]) but after an hour in the school he hides his relics under the carpet. Thrown into the real world, he is forced to use cunning, to achieve status not through the immediacy of physical accomplishments (or theatrical accomplishments, as in "The Blot on Peter Pan") but through a craftier form: the written word. Neil creates a niche at the school as one who, for a small fee, takes on the task of writing his peers' thank-you letters and school-assigned essays. The child Neil outwits language and emerges victorious over the adult, while the child-in-transition Tintinnabulum utilizes written language in order to maintain a social standing. With his entrance into the real world comes a loss of innocence, however. Made aware of a world in which he cannot simply seize the center stage, he is forced to fight for his rank.

He retains a sense of the power accorded through the stage. An essay that he writes for a friend named W.W. so perfectly imitates W.W.'s writing style that his godfather notes, "What I must face is this, that Tintinnabulum, being (alas) an artist, has been inside W.W." (90). Thus in order to write convincingly like any person, Neil must take on the role and identity of that person. Role-playing, which in Neil's youth provided him with a way of "showing off,"

continues in a modified form ("Blot" 89). His oblique method of showing off supports his ego so well that he writes these essays frequently and has, "since his return to school been inside at least half a dozen other boys" (90). Having once attained glory through the theatre, he has come to a world in which this theatre must be made metaphorical. The struggle to maintain his ego does not come as easily to Tintinnabulum as it had to Neil: "Tintinnabulum's opinion of himself… is lowlier than was Neil's" (91). In the light of such a disparity, Peter's rejection of the real world appears explicable.

Theater and language possess enormous power in their artistic utility. As creation is posited as the only method of conquering time, art is held up, in the *Peter Pan* works, as a substitute for the ultimate creation, the begetting of a child. The parallel between a work of art and a child is a strong one. In "Neil and Tintinnabulum," the narrator warns the reader that a person who employs Neil to write a letter cannot, during the writing of the letter, "go near him and the babe lest he clutch it to his breast and growl" (Barrie 90). The letter must ultimately be given away, but during the process of the letter's creation Neil exhibits a level of protectiveness likened to that of a mother protecting her child.

Even in its earliest stages the story illustrates a rivalry between art and motherhood as vehicles of creation. The narrator of *The Little White Bird*, an elderly bachelor named Captain W., sets his sights on a child named David and seeks to possess David by winning his affections away from his mother: "It was a scene conceived in a flash, and ever since relentlessly pursued, to burrow under Mary's influence with the boy, expose her to him in all her vagaries, take him utterly from her and make him mine" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 127). At one point, after convincing Mary to leave David and his perambulator in his apartment, he literally runs away with David (121). However, the bulk of the novel follows a slower, subtler strategy that requires

the summoning of all of his forces: his magic tricks, his unrivaled ability to manipulate his eyebrows (the feat for which he was renowned in grade school), an aptitude for explaining natural phenomena with extraordinary causes, and a capacity for story-telling which so places his child audience in the story that his listeners embed the moment in their consciousness and later remember having been there. Of these, the great power lies in story-telling.

As a narration directed at the child, this story-telling can be seen as an oral form of children's literature, and it follows the behavior of children's literature as understood by Jacqueline Rose. Rose maintains that children's literature is "a way of colonizing… the child" and is an adult attempt to capture and contain the child (Rose 16). The psychological survival of the adult is often dependent on the child; the narrator of "Neil and Tintinnabulum," recalling a time when his godson had regarded him as a source of wonder, notes, "When I think of Neil I know that those were the last days in which I was alive" (Barrie, 91). The captain, who long ago lost (and did not pursue) the opportunity to start a family, has no child, and he seeks to fill this void by capturing David and making the child his. In figuratively capturing the child, the captain purports to have bested any physical capturing (i.e., begetting) of a child. His assertion is pitifully self-deceiving, but he makes it in order to deal with his own absence of a child. The night Mary gives birth to David, the captain, meeting Mary's husband on the street, invents a child of his own, whom he names Timothy. He invents stories about Timothy to tell to Mary's husband, and as David grows, so too does the captain's imaginary child. When he learns that Mary and her husband cannot afford to buy David new clothes, however, he informs Mary's husband that Timothy has died, and he buys children's clothes (supposedly Timothy's old clothes) to give to David. The death of his imaginary son grieves him, however, and, attempting

to regain the fulfillment given to him by the idea of Timothy, he sets off on a quest to win David's affection away from Mary.

The opposition between art and motherhood is most clearly delineated in *The Little White Bird*. When the captain hears of Mary's plans to write a book about a little white bird (that is to say, a child, for in the lore of Peter Pan all children enter the world as birds), he attempts to outdo her by writing the book first and revolving it around the child, thus creating and laying claim on the child. He decides that "when, in the fullness of time, [Mary] held her baby on high, implying that she had done a big thing, [he] was to hold up the book" (Barrie 325). The book is thus placed on the same level as the child and described as a comparable achievement.

At one point the narrator thinks, "Oh, Mary, your thoughts are much too pretty and holy to show themselves to anyone but yourself. The shy things are hiding within you. If they could come into the open they would not be a book, they would be [a child]" (325). This statement furthers the comparison between the child and the work of art; here the two are conceptualized as having the same origins. Both derive from a need to create and are presented as alternative solutions to the same problem: the problem of time. The captain writes the book, which chronicles his adventures with David, and informs the reader that the present book is, in fact, the culmination of his efforts, a work aptly entitled *The Little White Bird*. In the dream-like sequence which occurs during his killing of Timothy, the captain mentions that "little white birds are the birds that never have a mother (76). The "little white bird," which his novel attempts to capture, is not really David, but Timothy. He imagines that in his work of art he has created a child superior to David or any real-life child. In his dedication, which he directs at Mary, he writes, "Madam, you chose the lower road, and contented yourself with obtaining the Bird. May I point out, by presenting you with this dedication, that in the meantime I am become the *parent*

(emphases added) of the Book? To you the shadow, to me the substance" (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 335-336). Upon reading the dedication, however, Mary points out what the captain has really known all along: that the art is imitation, and the child is the real.

As in the case of the captain of *The Little White Bird*, Peter seeks to use art to match up with and best the creation of the natural world. In the cycle of the real world, the child grows up and becomes (replaces) the parent. Creation that takes on its own life competes with the creator, a pattern most famously depicted in the biblical story of the human attempt to overthrow a god who had made them in his own image. For Peter, however, this threat is not present; he is the creation and the creator. In a way, then, his approach to immortality eliminates a deficiency in the rival approach.

Peter exhibits an unusual capacity to resist any contest to his approach to existence (his rejection of reality in favor of a fantastical realm), and to portray his world as superior to the world he has left behind: the lost boys know not to bring up issues like his curious weight and peculiar use of make-believe; lost boys who appear to be growing up are "thinned out" (that is, removed from the island) (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 112). His tendency to manipulate elements in his surroundings in order to justify his world mandates a close consideration of the factor which he cites as the greatest justification for his rejection of the real world: the treachery and undependability of the adult female, the figure who embodies the security of the real world. A consideration of Peter's constant confounding of truth and untruth suggests the possibility that Peter's story of the traitorous mother is his own myth. He tells Wendy and the lost boys, "Long ago… I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me; so I stayed away for moons and moons and moons, and then flew back; but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed" (167).

The narrator's next line is a telling one: "I am not sure that this was true, but Peter thought it was true" (167). When Hook breaks the rules of fairness and bites Peter, the narrator states, "No one ever gets over the first unfairness; no one except Peter. He often met it, but he always forgot it" (150). In Neverland he configures a world with an amnesia so strong that it imposes itself even on incoming inhabitants (the Darling children forget their own parents), and the idea of Peter carrying with him the memory of a maternal abandonment paints an inconsistent portrait of his mental workings.

An explanation for this inconsistency can be found in Harold Bloom's concept of the poet artist who creates his own predecessors. In an attempt to liberate himself from the memory of former artists, the artist revises his own perception of his predecessors such that his understanding of their works renders his own work superior (5). The concept of imitation comes with an inherent recognition that the duplicate is inferior to the original; "poets as poets cannot accept substitutions" (8). Neverland, however, eliminates this complication: imagination translates to reality, and pretending to eat a meal brings about the effects of actually eating the meal. Hartman states that art that "fights nature on nature's own ground… is bound to lose" (qtd. in Bloom 9). However, on the stage, the frame of a medium of art mandates a suspension of disbelief, and so the stomping of coconut props equates to thunder in nature. Natural thunder is further surpassed by the thunder of applause generated by recognition of the artist's genius. Peter's world glorifies the duplicate.

His act of self-creation (made perpetual through the succession of adventures) assumes to rival the creation of the world he has rejected. Faced with the possibility (ultimately, the reality) that his creation lies inferior to the creation of the world he has left behind, he fashions a myth that portrays his approach as one that lacks the weakness of the former approach. In creating the

breach of contract by the mother, Peter constructs a flaw within the very core of the real world's approach. He remains in Neverland, on the surface boastful and content with his lot until the night comes, whereupon emerges an understanding of his existence that induces in him dreams "more painful than the dreams of other boys" (181).

5. Conclusion: Peter's Tragedy

Peter, whose defining characteristic is his cockiness, rejects the real world on its adult terms, and fashions, instead, a realm in which he can exercise greater power. His attempt to resist time comes in the form of art. With his constant role-playing, and his lack of memory and lack of regard for the future, Peter (and Neverland, his stage), becomes a continually self-renewing work of art.

Much of the Peter Pan works revolve around this notion of art, and particularly the notion of language. Peter's amnesia and illiteracy provide him with an immediacy of experience which frees him from the confines of the real world. Within the works, the educational aspect of language is portrayed negatively. However, in explaining Walter J. Ong's claim that fully adopting the physical word (writing or printing) dramatically alters consciousness, Hsiao states that, "the shift in representation of the word from transient oral/aural event to fixed visual presence frees perception from monomaniacal devotion to the direct experience of the present" (Hsiao 156). Her definition figures the written word as a tool of freedom, and illiteracy as a prison. Indeed, in a world in which members are expected to join a "social order that defines adulthood by facility with language," illiteracy becomes "isolation from a set of collective knowledge" (Hsiao 156). This isolation characterizes Peter at the close of the adventure, when he stands outside the window, watching the Darling's family reunion through bars.

The double-edged sword of language is seen in the dual nature of the bars that mark the nursery window. When Liza enters the nursery she finds the "three wicked inmates breathing angelically" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 98). A similar depiction of life inside the nursery (the center of the home, and the setting for the earliest years of human life) can be seen in Wendy's wording of her essay questions, "Describe the Kennel and its Inmate" (136). The nursery clearly carries elements of a prison.

The Neverland, with its fantastical elements (magic, the power of flight, fairies, the potential for pretend to equate to real, etc.) appears to bear the picture of freedom. However, the very nature of Neverland rests on its separation from the real world, and so its inhabitants are, by necessity, disconnected from human society and deprived of the securities provided by that society. Nana and the children may be described as inmates, but Tinkerbell's apartment is "no larger than a bird-cage" (135). Regarding the question of who the bars keep in our out, the work seems to point to both parties: the inhabitants of the real world, and the inhabitants of Neverland. The narrator's analogy of the sparrow and the lion informs the reader that Hook's antagonism towards Peter results from a perception that Hook is somehow restrained, while Peter is free (176). The real world's approach to immortality is but an illusion; Wendy sees her child as a channel through which she can "go on for ever and ever" (Barrie, *Peter Pan* 6.1.256-257), but in narrating an event that takes place years after the Darling children's adventures, the narrator describes house's change in inhabitants and notes, almost in passing, that "Mrs. Darling was now dead and forgotten" (*Peter and Wendy* 221). The real world's approach is thus lacking. Peter's Neverland, however, is equally lacking, and seeped in illusion and pretend. His decision to inhabit fantasy rather than reality also results in a serious loss. The comedy of the circular image first provided by the island (that of the boys, pirates, Picaninnies, and crocodile all chasing each

other determinedly, but at the same speed and so to no avail) illustrates the sterility of his approach.

His inability to age or feel the effects of time define him as immortal, but the texts closely relate him to death. Mrs. Darling remembers tales of a fairy-like Peter Pan about whom strange stories were told, "as that when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened" (75). The novel explains that the lost boys (Peter's fellow cohabiters in Neverland) are the children who "fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way" (95). In the Kensington Gardens, Peter takes on the duty of digging graves for two boys who "had fallen unnoticed from their perambulators" (Barrie, *The Little White Bird* 65). The fall from the perambulator effectively equates to death; the lost boys (and, by association, their captain, Peter) are linked to corpses, and Neverland to a sort of afterlife.

Peter's desire for control lies at the root of his rejection of the real world; he rejects a world in which the transition to adulthood necessitates a muting of identity and an abandoning of the child's sense of grandiosity. Ultimately, however, Peter stands outside the bars, looking in at a happiness of which he cannot take part (214). His version of immortality (continuation of existence through the constant re-invention of the self) becomes not substitution for the real world's version of immortality (continuation of existence through the creation of the child), but poor imitation.

Stranded on Marooner's Rock and facing (so he believes) the prospect of death, he utters his famous cry, "To die will be an awfully big adventure" (*Peter Pan* 3.1.180). His appraisal of his situation, however, must be treated with some doubt. At the close of the play, when Wendy leaves him in Neverland, the voice within the stage directions considers the nature of Peter's

existence and the “riddle of his being,” and notes, “If he could get the hang of the thing his cry might become ‘To live would be an awfully big adventure!’” (5.2.208, 208-209).

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