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“TO LIVE WOULD BE AN AWFULLY BIG ADVENTURE”: MASCULINITY IN J.M.  
BARRIE’S *PETER PAN* AND ITS CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the representation of masculinity in J.M. Barrie's novel, *Peter Pan*, as well as in two of its cinematic adaptations: Disney's *Peter Pan* and P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan*. In particular, I consider the question: What exactly keeps Peter from growing up and becoming a man? Furthermore, I examine the cultural ideals of masculinity contemporary to each work, and consider how they affected the work's illustration of masculinity. Then, drawing upon adaptation theory, I argue that with each adaptation comes a slightly variant image of masculinity, producing new meanings within the overall narrative of Peter Pan. This discovery provides insight into the continued relevance of Peter Pan in Western society, and subsequently, how a Victorian children's adventure fiction is adapted to reflect contemporary ideologies and values.

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## Introduction

Peter Pan, the eternal boy, has been a topic of study among scholars from the moment his story was introduced in J.M. Barrie's original 1902 play, *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will focus on the novel, *Peter and Wendy*, written by Barrie in 1911, which is based upon the play, and is known today as simply *Peter Pan*. The story has come to provide a critical lens with which to view traditional, twentieth-century British masculinity. In particular, Peter's inability to evolve into manhood reflects the struggle of Edwardian males to successfully transition themselves into adulthood. Thus, the cultural significance of the novel is one of the reasons why Michael Mangan describes it as "one of the most important anti-naturalistic dramas of the period" (194). In his analysis of the novel, Mangan explains that in a traditional Victorian household, the mother is the figure from which the boy must escape "in order to proceed towards manhood" (199). Building upon this idea, then, he considers the topography of the Neverland as a fantastical reflection of Victorian/Edwardian London, arguing that it is a place in which Peter and the Lost Boys are able to both escape from and safely desire a mother figure. The difference between the Neverland and London, however, is that the children do not grow up in the Neverland. Thus, the idea that Barrie seems to be conveying in his novel is that boys are incapable of growing up, of becoming men, without the presence of a mother figure – thus, the boys who do not have mothers are sent to the Neverland, where growing up is not only impossible, it is unlawful.

The novel's harshest critics argue that its female characters are portrayed as inferior to the hard-working male figures. As Heather Shipley contends, "*Peter Pan* exemplifies particular

male-dominant, orchestrated narratives and role assignments” (145). Yet, to dismiss the novel as anti-female is to place it in the same category as the late-Victorian adventure novels to which Barrie is responding. According to Michael Mangan, nineteenth-century boys’ adventure fiction was “aimed...at inculcating and celebrating the values of British manhood in a context which is always implicitly...imperialist” (194). In contrast, Barrie’s *Peter Pan* invites readers to recognize and acknowledge the obvious flaws in this way of thinking about British masculinity. Rather than praising the Englishman “with his stiff upper lip and masterly control over world affairs,” the novel celebrates women and motherhood by depicting the male characters as ineffectual, ill-tempered fools who cannot perform their active duties as men without the presence of strong women in their lives (Rutherford 12).

In the first part of this thesis, I will closely examine J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* in support of the aforementioned argument. Through its depiction of the primary adult male figures—Mr. Darling and Captain Hook—as well as the relationships between men and women, the novel both criticizes the Edwardian notion that masculinity is only achieved once the boy entirely severs ties with his mother, and praises women as being the necessary link between boyhood and manhood. The analysis will focus primarily on two sites where this opposition between masculinity and maternity is represented and interrogated: the nursery and the home under the ground.

The second part of my study will draw on adaptation theory in order to analyze how later film versions of the story translated the novel’s depiction of masculinity in order to reflect a diverse culture and time period. The two films I have chosen to examine are Walt Disney’s 1953 animated feature *Peter Pan* and P.J. Hogan’s 2003 live-action film *Peter Pan*.

Upon first reading J.M. Barrie’s original novel, one is struck by the differences between it and later adaptations. Despite its proclaimed genre as a children’s novel, the original story of

Peter Pan is immensely more sinister and problematic than the one developed by Walt Disney and his fellow filmmakers. As such, a brief assessment of the culture surrounding these later adaptations will illuminate many of the reasons why the Peter Pan we recognize today is far from the effeminate, sexually ambiguous 6-year-old boy whom Barrie conceived in Edwardian England. Moreover, a study of the story's visual adaptations will provide further insight into the ways in which adaptations in general are as much their own unique creations as they are reproductions of an original narrative.

#### Maintaining Masculinity Within the Feminine World of Domesticity: The Victorian Family

The typical family structure in Victorian England was defined by the father's role as primary income provider and strict disciplinarian, and the mother's role as caretaker and submissive domestic partner. In their relationships to their children, it was the father who was responsible for teaching his children to conduct themselves according to the prescribed social expectations of the period (Mintz 96). The struggles and challenges for a middle-class Victorian child are often characterized by his or her responsibility to prove his or her independence. The child was expected, then, to demonstrate "a high degree of self-sufficiency, self-direction, and independence" (84). In developing that independence, however, filial tensions began to rise between the dominant father and an increasingly self-reliant child. Thus, the rapport between a father and his children was often one of conflict and tension: "...it was the father, not the mother...who became the symbolic antagonist for the children and a lightning rod for conflicts within the Victorian middle-class home" (60).

The mother's role, however, was often linked to what Jonathan Rutherford calls, "the language of emotion"; that role was understood to be sacred, as she was responsible for raising

her children and providing “a haven” for her husband in which he may escape the corrupted world of money and business (20). Thus, the woman “commanded domestic power” in the home, and her growing authority “was seen as a potential threat to male dominance” (20). This was problematic for men because on the one hand, their society expected them to be in control of themselves, as well as their families; on the other hand, the mother’s power in the home made them aware of their continued dependency on women, which they considered to be jeopardizing their masculinity. This threat, then, led to a growing number young boys who were taught to repress a relationship with their mothers; as a result, many young man matured with an underdeveloped emotional maturity, leading to a diminished sense of masculinity

The public schools of Edwardian England were greatly influential on the development of a young boy’s masculinity They instilled in male students the appropriate qualities of English masculinity: sportsmanship, readiness, integrity, and piety. These masculine values were inculcated in boys in an effort to make them both self-sufficient and able servants of empire. The values were also understood to be largely antithetical of the characteristics associated with femininity: domesticity, motherhood, passivity, and emotion. For that reason, the relationship between a boy and his mother came to seem threatening to his pursuit of masculinity, despite his need for intimacy and comfort found at home. As boys grew into men, these ideals of manliness remained necessary and relevant factors contributing to the development of their masculinity, since the “language” of public schools largely reflected that of the national culture (Rutherford 15). Indeed, the male’s desire to maintain his strength and power in the home mirrors England’s broader involvement in its empire, which entailed conquering and controlling outside nations. In the home, however, the woman represented a disruption in the male’s attempt to command each

aspect of his life due to her inevitably powerful role in the domestic sphere—thus, she remained the man’s primary weakness.

In his study of late Victorian English masculinity, Rutherford describes the relationship between a mother and child as a “patriarchal institution of motherhood”—the effects of which men seemed to be particularly frightened of. He explains:

The generation which grew up after 1860 displayed an insecurity in their masculine identities which manifested itself in a flight from domesticity, a growing disparagement of the “feminine,” a readiness to go abroad and an increasing refusal amongst late Victorian men to marry. (19)

Consequently, it was believed that should a boy fail to distance himself emotionally from his mother, he would be trapped in a life of “idleness” (12). This fear, then, helped to Victorian England as a “mother-blaming” society in which the women and mothers became responsible for “the travails of men.” Subsequently, Victorian masculinity would come to be characterized by “narcissism, emotional immaturity and a preoccupation with self-sacrifice” (7). At the same time, however, the love of a mother and wife provided the only emotional outlet for the Victorian male—whose public identity was required to exude the qualities of competition, achievement, strength, and self-reliance (Mintz 107). Thus, despite the male’s reluctance towards establishing an affective relationship with his mother, that relationship created the safest space in which he was able to experience the care, help, and support he lacked daily among his male counterparts. The home then, was the only place in which a woman had the potential to hold power and influence over her male counterparts.

### J.M. Barrie: The Boy Inside a Man's Body

In order to understand *Peter Pan*'s vividly apparent obsession with youth and motherhood, one may look no further than towards the writer himself. Indeed, nearly all critics of Barrie's work find it difficult to separate this particular text from its author, whose own extraordinary and tragic life undoubtedly manifested itself through the adventures of Peter and the Lost Boys.

On May 9, 1860, James Matthew Barrie was born in a small cottage in the lush countryside surrounding Kirriemuir, Scotland; he was the third of seven surviving children (Billone ix). Yet, unlike many other young boys at the time, James was never pressured to distance himself from his mother; in fact, she was his greatest inspiration. So influential had she been on his writing, that he claimed that he did not write unless he saw "a little girl, of whom my mother has told me, wandering confidently through the pages"—the girl is his mother (Barrie 24). In 1896, James wrote a memoir of his mother's life, and when describing her, he says, "For when you looked into my mother's eyes you knew, as if He had told you, why God sent her into the world—it was to open the minds of all who looked to beautiful thoughts. And that is the beginning and end of literature" (5). When Barrie was six years old, however, tragedy struck their family. His older brother, David, was killed in a skating accident at 13 years old, and Barrie's mother would never fully recover from his death. Barrie goes on to recall the day his sister anxiously told him to go to his mother "and say to her that she still had another boy" (12). Excitedly, James raced to his mother's room to tell her only to find himself surrounded by darkness; after a while, he began to cry, until he finally heard his mother ask, "Is that you?" to which little James replied, "No, it's no him, it's just me" (12). From that moment, in his mother's eyes, James was overshadowed by the ghost of his dead brother.

James would spend much of his childhood trying to make up for the death of his mother's second son. Again, his sister would encourage him to make their mother feel better by trying to get her to talk about David. It eventually become a role for James to play. Consumed by "an intense desire to become so like him that even my mother should not see the difference," he would secretly practice David's mannerisms and gestures as described by his mother's stories of him (15-16). Yet, as Barrie grew older, David would perpetually remain a boy of 13 years old, an idea that haunted James later in life:

The horror of my boyhood was that I knew a time would come when I also must give up the games, and how it was to be done I saw not (this agony still returns to me in dreams, when I catch myself playing marbles, and look on with cold displeasure). (29)

Thus, Barrie contemplated the notion of eternal youth for most of his life. For this reason, he remained close to children even as a grown man. In 1897, he befriended the Llewlyn Davies family, which consisted of parents Sylvia and Arthur Llewlyn Davies and their five rambunctious young boys: George, Jack, Peter, Michael, and Nicholas, to whom Barrie immediately became attached (Billone xviii).

Barrie first met George and Jack Llewlyn Davies one day while he was walking his dog; from then, he continued to meet them every day in Kensington Gardens, eventually becoming acquainted with their brothers, as well. Barrie's relationship with the Llewlyn Davies family quickly grew intimate. To Peter Hollindale, Barrie "ruthlessly" infiltrated their home and obtained "the surrogate family of boys that he could not engender himself" (203). His friendship with the boys, then, became a way for Barrie to recapture his sense of youth; although, scholars believe he was already physically stuck in childhood (203). At the time, Barrie was in an unhappy marriage to actress Mary Ansell. Probably because of the fact that he never matured

sexually—he was “sexless,” in effect—they never had children of their own and ended their marriage after a short three years (203). He discovered happiness, however, in the adventures and games he created with the Davies boys.

After one particularly eventful summer in 1901, spent with the family at Barrie’s cottage in Surrey, Barrie began to piece together the story of Peter Pan (Billone xix). Three years later, in 1904, Barrie’s play *Peter Pan; or The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up* was produced on the stage, the opening night of which ended in many curtain calls and acclaimed reviews from critics (xxi). Barrie knew, however, that he would be forever indebted to the Davies children, without which there would be no Peter Pan. Shortly after the play was finally produced, however, tragedy struck the Llewlyn Davies, and Barrie found himself the guardian of five orphaned boys (xxiii).

In 1907, Arthur Llewlyn Davies died of cancer. As interpreted in Marc Forster’s film *Finding Neverland*, Barrie became close with Davies’ wife, Sylvia. In his review of Andrew Birkin’s 1980 biography of Barrie for *The New Yorker*, V.S. Pritchett notes that Sylvia was “innocently amused,” by Barrie (117). She, then, undoubtedly provided inspiration for *Peter Pan*’s celebration of motherhood. Yet, only a few years later, Sylvia, too, died of cancer, and Barrie became the boys’ guardian, all the while loving and caring for them as his own.

To this day, critics speculate about the nature of Barrie’s relationship with these five young boys. For Hollindale, it seems only natural that modern critics are skeptical about Barrie’s intentions, given our age’s “pedophile phobia” regarding the relationships between adult men and children (201). Yet, many scholars eventually come to the conclusion of Barrie’s innocence. This includes Hollindale, who claims Barrie’s obsession with the family was “driven by the very absence of sex” (203). Indeed, the nature of their relationship is much simpler: The boys provided Barrie with an escape into the adventurous and beautifully carefree adolescence he

missed in his own childhood. In 1928, Barrie wrote a dedication to the play in honor of its publication, and in it, he says, “I suppose I always knew that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. That is all he is, the spark I got from you” (Barrie n.pag.). If Peter’s joy and adventures derive from the Llewlyn Davies boys, then, perhaps his tragedy is a manifestation of Barrie’s own misfortunes.

Billone writes, “As much as Barrie associated Peter Pan with doomed children who die before they fully mature, he also identified with all that made Peter Pan a tragic boy” (xxiv-xxv). Multiple times throughout the novel, Peter is described as “a tragedy”—indeed, it is Wendy’s first impression of him (Barrie 26). At the end of the novel, we learn that there is “one joy from which he must be for ever [sic] barred,” as Peter looks through the window into the Darling nursery, where the children have finally been reunited with their parents (147); it is part of the “riddle of his existence” (115). Indeed, although Barrie was granted guardianship over the boys, he never had a real family of his own, and experienced a childhood cloaked by the traumatic death of his brother. More tragedy would eventually come his way with the sudden deaths of George and Michael Llewlyn Davies, from which Barrie never entirely recovered (Billone xxvi).

*Peter Pan*, then, is both a novel of its time and an elaborate illustration of the joys and misfortunes in J.M. Barrie’s life. In it, readers navigate through the novel’s many binaries—life and death, youth and old age, masculinity and femininity, motherhood and fatherhood—and are instantly captivated by and inquisitive about the tragic boy who seemed to be stuck in between such divides, who refused to grow up. In a review of the play, Max Beerbohm wrote, “Mr. Barrie is not that rare creature, a man of genius. He is something even more rare—a child who, by some divine grace, can express through an artistic medium the childishness that is in him” (Billone xxi). As such, Barrie has given the world a rare treasure in the form of *Peter Pan*. We are like the

stars in the novel, who watch Peter, and, despite the cruel way in which he would sneak up behind them and try to blow them out, are nevertheless fond of his adventures. Barrie writes, “Stars are beautiful, but they may not take an active part in anything, they must just look on for ever [sic]” (23). And so, over one hundred years later, we look on, and continue to watch Peter, because he will always remind us of the beautiful perplexity and fleeting joy of childhood.

## **PART ONE: THE NOVEL**

The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up and the Man Who Failed to: A Masculinity in  
Crisis in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*

## Chapter 1

### The Nursery

“Wendy, however, felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy” (Barrie 26). Thus, Wendy’s first impression of the vainglorious, yet captivating boy, Peter Pan, is characterized by the fact that he has no mother. It is this characteristic—motherlessness—that leads Wendy to come to the conclusion that Peter is unquestionably “a tragedy.” Furthermore, it marks the beginning of the novel’s implicit struggle between mother and son; or rather, between maternity and masculinity. This dynamic is initially presented as one of tenderness, safety, and comfort, as illustrated by the relationship between Mrs. Darling and the three Darling children. As the narrative deepens, however, this illustration of the tender relationship between mother and child is complicated by Peter’s explicitly articulated disapproval of mothers, deriving from his abandonment by his own mother; the text confirms this: “Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one” (26). Subsequently, the novel creates this fraught relationship between mother and son—one that parallels the widespread fear of the feminine among English men in the Victorian age, as presented in the previous section. Yet, the text does so in order to illustrate that the reason why Peter is incapable of growing up, or does not want to, is due to the fact that he has no mother figure in his life. Thus, the novel criticizes this Victorian ideology of fearing the maternal, and contends that in order for a boy to successfully and efficiently transition into a man, he must develop a strong relationship with his mother. Peter Pan, then, is a representation of the English men in the early twentieth century who continued to possess childlike qualities well into adulthood due to their fear of repression of a relationship with their mothers. I will now examine the significant scenes that take place within the two key

settings—the nursery and the home under the ground, respectively—in order to expose the specific ways in which the text criticizes contemporary England’s approval of a distanced relationship between mother and son.

The introduction of the primary father and mother figures—Mr. and Mrs. Darling—establishes the novel’s view of fathers and mothers. Mr. Darling embodies “The imaginary English man with his stiff upper lip and masterly control over world affairs” (Rutherford 12). Rutherford’s image evokes the characteristics of self-assurance and power—two qualities that Mr. Darling desperately works to maintain in his household. Indeed, when Mrs. Darling is pregnant with Wendy, Mr. Darling insists on calculating the expenses it would take to keep the child and continue to afford to live comfortably. As the narrator explains, “his way was with a pencil and a piece of paper...” (Barrie 8). Thus, Mr. Darling does not allow emotion to compromise the use of logic and reason when making decisions. Moreover, he continuously asserts himself as the head of the household, which seems to be more for his own assurance than for that of his family. This particular aspect of Mr. Darling’s character will be discussed later on.

Despite Mr. Darling’s brief appearance in the novel’s introductory chapter, readers sense the narrator’s strongly negative opinion of him. When he is mentioned, the narrator characterizes Mr. Darling using heavy sarcasm. In detailing Mr. Darling’s career, the narrator claims:

He was one of those deep ones who know about stocks and shares. Of course no one really knows, but he quite seemed to know, and he often said stocks were up and shares were down in a way that would have made any woman respect him. (7-8)

Although the statement conveys a seemingly positive illustration of Mr. Darling’s respectability, it contains an undertone of mockery. Mr. Darling claims a mastery of “stocks and shares,” that he evidently does not have. Moreover, insofar as “no one really knows,” the text is aware that

any man who claims this mastery—a claim congruent with period masculine ideals—is in this regard, a fraud. The narrator continues by addressing Mr. Darling’s desire not to draw attention to himself and his family: “Mr. Darling had a passion for being exactly like his neighbors” (8). In other words, he is concerned largely with his public reputation. Conversely, Mrs. Darling’s introduction is much more flattering and complimentary. The first sentence to describe Mrs. Darling includes the words “lovely,” “romantic,” and “sweet.” Thus, from the beginning of the novel, readers are encouraged to regard Mrs. Darling with approbation.

The novel’s criticism of Mr. Darling is primarily illustrated when he struggles to put on his tie. The narrator jokes, “. . .he knew about stocks and shares, [but he] had no real mastery of his tie” (18). Mr. Darling loses his temper entirely and his behavior mirrors that of his own children; Mr. Darling, himself, recalls storming into the nursery “like a tornado” (18). Upon first entering the nursery, the narrator describes the tie Mr. Darling holds in his hand as “the crumpled little brute,” emphasizing the immense frustration Mr. Darling feels for his inability to fasten his tie properly. When he notices Mrs. Darling is not “sufficiently impressed” with his initial complaint, he continues by threatening to never return to work and thus starve himself while leaving their children to fend for themselves in the streets. In the end, the narrator reveals that all he had come to ask for was Mrs. Darling’s help, which evidently resulted in his wildly immature and dramatic tantrum. Furthermore, despite his outwardly childish antics, the narrator ironically compliments Mr. Darling, claiming he is “too fine of a nature” to resent the ease with which Mrs. Darling tied his tie. Indeed, as soon as she is finished, “he thanked her carelessly, at once forgot his rage, and in another moment was dancing around the room . . .” (19). This sudden “forgetfulness” parallels Peter Pan’s own forgetful nature, who forgets about Wendy, John, and Michael, while still on their flight to the Neverland (40). Mangan also comments on Mr.

Darling's childlike nature saying, "Mr. Darling...is yet another figure who positions himself both as husband and as son in relation to his wife" (203). Mr. Darling's behavior along with the narrator's derisive tone towards him leads readers to adopt a rather unfavorable impression of the father figure. His troubles, however, do not end there.

A few moments after Mr. Darling's tie blunder, a situation arises in which he is pressed by his children to take his medicine. From this scene, readers learn about Mr. Darling's most cherished possession: his pride. Before the action takes place, the narrator remarks, "Strong man though he was, there is no doubt that he had behaved rather foolishly over the medicine" (20). This comes after, of course, the tie scene, from which readers are already questioning his status as a "strong man." While preparing to take his medicine, Mr. Darling's tone begins to change from one of pride—when recounting his own good behavior as a child when he had to take his medicine—to that of irritation:

"I shall be sick, you know," Mr. Darling said threateningly.

"Come on, father," said John.

"Hold your tongue, John," his father rapped out.

Wendy was quite puzzled. "I thought you took it quite easily, father."

"That is not the point," he retorted. "The point is, that there is more in my glass than in Michael's spoon." His proud heart was nearly bursting. "And it isn't fair; I would say it though it were with my last breath; it isn't fair." (21)

In this particular moment of dialogue, it is significant to note the difference in the way in which the children and the father speak towards one another: Mr. Darling "rapped out," or "retorted," while Wendy and John speak much more calmly. Thus, this is another instance in which Mr. Darling essentially transforms into a child, culminating in his final plea, "...it isn't fair." In the end, Mr. Darling never takes his medicine. Instead, he decides to play a trick on Nana by putting his medicine into her milk bowl; the scene that follows is characterized primarily by Mr. Darling's refusal to lower his pride for the sake of upholding his power within the household.

The narrator first reveals Mr. Darling's deep shame for having so cruelly tricked Nana, but he still "would not give in" (22). However, after banishing Nana from the nursery, "he felt he was a strong man again" (22). The narrator continues by revealing Mr. Darling's motivation behind his cruelty is to "show who was master in the house" (22). The irony of the way in which Mr. Darling attempts to show his mastery in the household lies in the fact that he does not actually believe himself to be the "master." For Mr. Darling, the loss of power and authority translates to the loss of respect and admiration from his wife and children; the way in which his children looked at him, "as if they did not admire him," is what initially motivated Mr. Darling to go through with his prank (21). Thus, his petulant attempt to demonstrate his masculinity and regain his family's respect, results in an animated display of childish pride. Indeed, it is his unwavering pride that ultimately leads to the disappearance of his children—had Mr. Darling not chained Nana outside for the evening, the children would not have been given the opportunity to escape with Peter.

Subsequently, the children's final moments with each of their parents differ dramatically. While the "wretched father" was chaining up Nana outside, Mrs. Darling puts the children to bed. Michael's final words to his mother are, "I'm glad of you," while there is no final salutation between Mr. Darling and his children. Thus, the relationships between the Darling children and each of their parents are visibly distinct, as it is evident that the children have more respect for their mother than their father. As Mr. and Mrs. Darling leave this section of the narrative, their roles are replaced by those of Wendy and Peter, whose first meeting mimics the previous scene involving the tie between Wendy's parents.

The first scene between Wendy and Peter is characterized primarily by each person's attempt to belittle the other's character. In terms of power dynamics between the two genders,

their encounter is in direct contrast with the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Darling illustrated earlier. Wendy, echoing her mother's interactions with Mr. Darling, subtly patronizes Peter in a way that seems obvious to readers but is entirely overlooked by him. This idea is affirmed by the text's description of her speech as having been said "just a little patronisingly," and again when Wendy refers to Peter as, "my little man" while she is "exulting in his ignorance" (26). The scene from which this dialogue derives, in which Peter is unable to successfully reattach his shadow to himself, parallels the "tie tantrum" thrown by Mr. Darling. Mr. Darling's stark shift in disposition before and after Mrs. Darling fixes his tie is mirrored in Peter's behavior as he goes from crying to "jumping about in the wildest glee," after Wendy successfully sews on his shadow (27). In both of these paired relationships, men are represented as inherently inferior to women, yet it must seem, to them, as though they are not.

This parallelism between Mr. Darling and Peter suggests how Peter is reflective of his adult male counterparts. As Michael Mangan argues, "Peter Pan is used as a signifier for the kind of man who refuses to become fully 'masculine.' At its most basic this means the immature male, the 'man behaving badly', who simply refuses to grow up and assume the responsibilities of adult masculinity, but attempts to cling to—and live out—the myth of an eternal boyhood" (198). In the case of Mr. Darling, he lives out "the myth of an eternal boyhood" subconsciously rather than explicitly refusing to assume the responsibilities of adulthood; it is almost as if he cannot help but behave like a boy. Peter, then, may come to represent the undeveloped male within each of the adult male characters. Why these men are unable to fully transition into adulthood becomes more apparent once Wendy is placed within the boy's fantasy, the Neverland—a world without mothers.

The final nursery scene that I will discuss takes place just before the children are about to return to their home in London. The text explains that since the children disappeared, Mr.

Darling, as a means of self-punishment, has been living inside Nana's cage:

...Mr. Darling felt in his bones that all the blame was his for having chained Nana up, and that from first to last she had been wiser than he. Of course, as we have seen, he was quite a simple man; indeed he might have passed for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness off; but he had also a noble sense of justice and a lion courage to do what seemed right to him; and having thought the matter out with anxious care after the flight of the children, he went down on all fours and crawled into the kennel. (141-142)

This passage illustrates the literal reduction of Mr. Darling from man to animal, one that takes place within the feminine space of the nursery. It also, however, suggests a certain self-awareness that Mr. Darling did not have at the beginning of the novel; we learn that he has, in a sense, realized his grave mistakes. Yet, as the narrator notes, Mr. Darling is still a boyish, "simple man." Indeed, the decision to live out the rest of his life in a cage—essentially, a man pretending to be an animal—still seems a rather bizarre gesture, almost childish. Thus, Mrs. Darling resides as the dominant figure within this family structure; while Mr. Darling hides away in a cage, she must remain strong and hopeful for the both of them in light of the children's possible return.

The significance of these four scenes—the tie episode, the medicine scene and Nana's banishment, Wendy and Peter's first meeting, and the caged Mr. Darling—lies primarily in the setting in which it takes place: the nursery. As Michael Mangan remarks, "In the gendered topography of the Victorian household, the nursery was clearly defined as a feminine space... On a metaphorical level, it was the woman's domain from which the young Victorian boy needed to

escape in order to proceed towards manhood.” The authority and respect for Mrs. Darling within this space is illustrated explicitly by Mr. Darling’s tantrum in the nursery as well as the Darling children’s treatment of him in comparison to their relationship with their mother. As soon as he enters the space, Mr. Darling is reduced to becoming a child—or worse, an animal—which consequently diminishes his role as disciplinarian, since Mrs. Darling evidently possesses the power in this particular setting.

## Chapter 2

### The Neverland

The second part of my analysis of *Peter Pan* focuses on Peter and the children's time in the Neverland, paying particular attention to their interactions within "the home under the ground"—Peter and the Lost Boys' home. Once Wendy arrives, this home quickly acts as a mirror image of the Darling nursery. Indeed, a useful way of thinking about the Neverland is as an inverted version of the Victorian household, with Wendy and Peter as the head of the family unit, and the mother—Wendy—serving as a powerful source of security in the boys' lives. As I will maintain, the novel criticizes the traditional view of masculinity in Victorian England, which holds that a boy's relationship with his mother should remain distanced in order for the boy to properly develop into an adult male. Instead, the novel suggests the contrary: A boy must foster a strong relationship with his mother in order to mature into a responsible adult. The Neverland is essentially a world without mothers, the lack of which results in the boys' inability to "grow up." This concept is realized in the final chapters of the novel, when Wendy successfully convinces the boys to join her in London, where they are adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Darling and where they will grow to become English gentlemen. Thus, Wendy's arrival in the Neverland provides the Lost Boys with the opportunity to grow up and mature into responsible adults.

In the preceding chapter, I highlight four distinct scenes within the nursery setting. However, an episodic treatment of the Neverland does not work because the issue of masculinity with regards to maternity is entirely woven into the second half of the narrative. Thus, I will discuss four moments within the Neverland episodes that best demonstrate the prevailing attitude towards mothers in the Neverland as well as the positive effect Wendy has, as a mother figure, on the inhabitants of the Neverland: Captain Hook's introduction and his own attitude towards

mothers; Tootle's accidental shooting of Wendy; Peter's interaction with the Never Bird; and finally, Peter and Wendy's final scene together before she attempts to leave the Neverland.

Michael Mangan describes Peter's adversary on the island, Captain Hook, as representing a "destructive" masculinity which is the "alter-ego" to Mr. Darling's "inadequate" masculinity (202). Although the text does not reveal much of his own experiences with mothers, Hook consistently refers to mothers—more specifically, to the absence of mothers in the Neverland—and the powerful effect mothers have on the Lost Boys. His references, then, seem to suggest Hook's obsession with the idea of maternity. When he is introduced in the novel, Hook reveals his plan to defeat and kill the Lost Boys—to leave a poisoned cake at the entrance of their home under the ground—which is contingent upon their lack of maternal guidance: "The silly moles had not the sense to see that they did not need a door apiece. That shows they have no mother... They will find the cake and gobble it up, because, having no mother, they don't know how dangerous 'tis to eat rich damp cake" (Barrie 57). Hook's recognition of the powerful influence a mother has on the development of common sense in her children reinforces the idea that *Peter Pan* advances an argument for the importance of an emotional bond between mother and son during his stage of maturation. Moreover, when Hook discovers that Wendy is on the island with the Lost Boys, he declares in defeat, "The game's up... those boys have found a mother" (80). Later on when Smee asks if the mother is there to help Peter, Hook responds, "Ay, that is the fear that haunts me" (81). Hook, then, believes he has already been defeated, because having a mother seems to make the boys more powerful.

When describing Wendy's role in the Neverland, Mangan argues, "The fantasy island has domesticity imported into it, in the shape of Wendy—whose metaphorical task as a young Victorian female is to leave the nursery as a child in order to return to it later in life as a mother"

(199). As a result, Wendy is the embodiment of maternity in the Neverland, there to provide stability for what Monique Chassagnol identifies as “a masculinity in crisis” (201). In her analysis of *Peter Pan*, Chassagnol suggests this crisis is highlighted in the male characters’ inability “to form mature relationships with females,” which she recognizes as stemming from the boy being separated too soon from his mother (201, 208). Thus, as I contend, the absence of the maternal in the Neverland directly affects the development of the boys’ masculinity, making Wendy’s arrival in the Neverland much more significant.

Indeed, the moment the Lost Boys realize Wendy has come to be their mother, she becomes their most valuable possession, which, in fact, contradicts the Victorian male tendency to push away the desire for his mother. Yet, immediately upon entering the Neverland, Tootles accidentally shoots Wendy in the chest with an arrow, mistaking her—upon Tinkerbell’s guidance—for a “great white bird” (58). Given that the Neverland is a place in which mothers do not exist, the boys seem to be perpetuating their own motherless-ness. Once Tootles realizes this mistake, he is distraught, and reveals, “When ladies used to come to me in dreams, I said, ‘Pretty mother, pretty mother.’ But when at last she really came, I shot her” (60). This declaration seems to be symbolic of the Victorian Englishman’s repression of maternal companionship, despite their internal desire for it. Indeed, in the Victorian and Edwardian family structure, the mother “was figured as that which the male child needed, and that from which he most needed to be protected” (Mangan 204); thus, the maternal power is both reassuring and terrifying.

This moment in the text, in which Tootles accidentally shoots Wendy, and the events that follow, have been a central part of the critical discussion of *Peter Pan*, especially with regards to its treatment of the female characters. Susan Kissel references this particular scene in the title of her essay, “‘But When at Last She Really Came, I Shot Her’: *Peter Pan* and the Drama of

Gender,” in which she views the female characters in *Peter Pan* as being stuck in their assumed roles as mother and caretaker; this narrow view, however, weakens the novel’s unmistakable praise of motherhood and the powerful effect its presence, in the form of Wendy, has on the motherless Peter and the Lost Boys. In her essay, Kissel mentions that, after Peter discovers Tootles has shot Wendy, Peter twice attempts to strike him in the chest with his own arrow, but ultimately fails because Wendy, in her sleep, stops him (Barrie 62). Kissel argues that Wendy, being the mother figure, is “associated with maintaining life,” while the boys are associated with “taking it” (38). While this may appear to be true, Kissel fails to recognize the monumental nature of Peter’s inability to kill Tootles. When the novel reveals Peter’s murderous side, it does rather briefly and in a tone that suggests Peter never hesitates when killing a Lost Boy: “The boys on the island vary, of course, according as they get killed and so on; and when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules, Peter thins them out” (49). Thus, while it is true that Wendy is responsible for preserving Tootles’ life, it is more important that Wendy displays a remarkably strong influence on Peter, further reinforcing the significance of the maternal presence in the Neverland.

Subsequently, while the Lost Boys seem to exhibit the character traits prevalent among Victorian males—the repression of the maternal—their explicit desire for a mother distinguishes them from the boys of Victorian England. Indeed, when Wendy finally wakes up, the boys beg her to be their mother: “Then all went on their knees, and holding out their arms cried, ‘O Wendy lady, be our mother’” (68). Thus, the Neverland also seems to be a place in which the boys who have not been exposed to Victorian society and ideologies, specifically in regards to maternal companionship, display an inherent devotion to Wendy because she represents the mother figure they lack. This relationship between Wendy and the Lost Boys is fundamental to understanding

the novel's critical attitude towards Victorian ideologies of masculinity; because Wendy represents the maternal, it is the Lost Boys' ultimate acceptance of and emotional attachment to her that allows them to leave the Neverland in order to grow into English gentlemen. Their embrace of the maternal represents a reformed version of the Victorian male. Therefore, not only does the novel critique period ideas about masculinity, but also points readers in the direction of a better model of manhood. Peter, however, is the only boy who chooses to stay in the Neverland, suggesting the idea that his is a total rejection of the maternal figure. However, the scene between Peter and the Never Bird is a primary example of Peter's implicit desire for a mother.

Despite the Neverland being "a world without mothers," there is one purely maternal figure within the landscape: the Never Bird. Initially praised by Captain Hook as a paradigmatic mother figure ("See...that is a mother"), the Never Bird is used in the text to signify the purest example of motherhood (Barrie 81). Indeed, it is her selfless love towards Peter that prompts a change in his character from narcissistic to compassionate. In the episode in which Peter is stuck on a rock that is quickly submerging underwater, he is sure of his imminent death, proudly saying, "To die will be an awfully big adventure" (87). The Never Bird, however, arrives to save Peter, and willingly sacrifices her unhatched eggs in order to allow Peter to get into her nest and safely drift ashore (89). This act moves Peter to display a sense of good will that is unusual for his normally playful and selfish persona; indeed, the Never Bird pauses in the sky solely to "see what he did with the eggs," and covers her eyes when he lifts the eggs out of the nest, expecting the worst. Nevertheless, Peter finds a way to save the eggs and return them to their mother. This is one of the only episodes in the text in which Peter does not treat the moment as "a game" to be played, but rather proves he has the capacity to act maturely and thoughtfully. Specifically, it is

his experience of a mother's selfless love which ultimately incites a genuinely "grown-up" reaction from Peter. Therefore, maternity affects Peter's maturation into adulthood naturally, without him being aware of it. As a result, the rest of the novel reveals an alternative side to Peter, one in which he acts to help others, rather than for solely selfish purposes.

Peter and Wendy's "final night" together in the home under the ground illustrates Wendy's superiority as a mother figure over Peter and the Lost Boys. In her essay, "*Peter Pan and the White Imperialist*," Mary Brewer discusses the effect of Peter's role as the "Great White Father" on the characters of the Neverland (Barrie 91). Peter gives himself the title after returning home from his adventure with the Never Bird. Brewer suggests that despite the fact that "Pan can only deal with the role of the father in play," his performance "carries real force on the island" (Brewer 390). She goes on to argue that "by enacting the role of Great White Father, Pan makes a real bid for absolute authority over Wendy" (390). I will argue, however, that despite Wendy's supposed inferiority to Peter—suggested primarily by the way in which she refuses to talk negatively about Peter in front of the boys (Barrie 91)—she is the only character in the novel who Peter obeys. As such, the scene of their final night together exhibits Wendy's authority over Peter. Moreover, there are additional scenes in which Peter's decisions are ultimately influenced by Wendy's guidance, such as the previously discussed moment in which she stops Peter from killing Tootles.

Peter's relationship with Wendy is significant in examining the way in which the novel critiques Victorian ideals of masculinity because it reveals that he seems to understand what the Lost Boys do not: Growing up depends upon the presence of a maternal figure in a boy's life. Peter is obedient to Wendy because he inherently wants to please his "mother," only insofar as he may remain a little boy; thus, he refuses to return to London with Wendy, suggesting the fact

that Wendy—as a mother—would guide him to adulthood. Peter and Wendy’s final night together demonstrates that although Peter is obedient to Wendy, his desire not to fully mature is much stronger than his desire to have a mother. In contrast, the Lost Boys signify a newer generation of young men more willing to embrace a maternal relationship rather than repress it.

After sharing her bedtime story, Wendy tells her brothers it is time to return to their nursery in London, and the Lost Boys are instantly “panic-stricken at the thought of losing Wendy,” their only mother (102). Thus, they choose to join her rather than to stay behind with Peter, whose contempt towards mothers, despite the connection he shares with the Never Bird, is still palpable. Peter refuses to join Wendy in London because, as he iterates, “I just want always to be a little boy and to have fun” (104). Nevertheless, once Peter discovers that Captain Hook has captured Wendy and the boys, his first instinct is to take his medicine, fulfilling the last request she made to him before she was captured:

Peter’s heart bobbed up and down as he listened. Wendy bound, and on the pirate ship;  
she who loved everything to be just so!

“I’ll rescue her!” he cried, leaping at his weapons. As he leapt he thought of something he  
could do to please her. He could take his medicine. (117)

Therefore, I maintain, that Wendy has a powerful influence on Peter; even in her absence, Wendy guides Peter to make the right choices. Moreover, the text’s emphasis on the capture of Wendy in particular suggests the idea that had she not been on board the ship with the other boys, perhaps Peter would not have been as inclined to save them. Consequently, Peter’s relationship with Wendy results in the display of a more honorable side to his character. Thus, despite Peter’s outwardly superior attitude towards Wendy, the text implicitly suggests, contrary to Brewer’s claims, that Wendy, as the Neverland’s maternal figure, holds authority over Peter.

## Part One Conclusion

After Peter and Hook's climactic battle, in which Peter finally defeats Hook and feeds him to the crocodile, the children celebrate together on the pirate ship on their way back to London. On the ship, Peter becomes "Captain Peter," and he quickly begins to assume the role left behind by Hook. The narrator explains that rather than making the ship an "honest" one, Peter discreetly keeps it a "pirate," so as not to worry Wendy while she is still on board:

The general feeling was that Peter was honest just now to lull Wendy's suspicions, but that there might be a change when the new suit was ready, which, against her will, she was making for him out of some of Hook's wickedest garments. It was afterwards whispered among them that on the first night he wore this suit he sat long in the cabin with Hook's cigar-holder in his mouth and one hand clenched, all but the forefinger, which he bent and held threateningly aloft like a hook. (140)

As the text reveals, Peter begins to physically embody the character of Captain Hook by wearing his "wickedest garments" and even bending the shape of his hand into the form of a hook. For readers, this is an unsettling image meant to suggest Peter's possible future as the "next" Captain Hook. In *The Peter Pan Syndrome*, psychologist Dan Kiley describes a man plagued by the inability to fully mature, and thus in a state of mental and emotional instability. Furthermore, in his study, he highlights this particular moment of the text in order to support his argument that the lifestyle of a "PPS" victim can be summarized in one word: piratical. He explains, "Barrie suggests that Peter's alter ego is a pirate. Given enough time and space, Peter could become as heartless and uncaring as his nemesis Captain Hook" (33). Indeed, this seems to be what the text is suggesting. As previously mentioned, Peter is the only of the children to stay behind and not accept Wendy's offer; or, in other words, he wishes to remain motherless. Captain Hook, then,

being the extreme result of a boy who grows old without a mother's love, seems signify Peter's inevitable future, should Peter begin to grow up.

In the end, however, Peter returns to the nursery every year or so to bring Wendy to the Neverland for "spring-cleaning time" (151). It is a tradition that is passed down to the girls in Wendy's family line: her daughter, then her daughter's daughter, and so forth; and Peter refers to these girls as his mothers (158-159). Thus, perhaps it is the recurrent maternal presence that keeps Peter from ever truly transforming into a "Captain Hook" figure. More importantly, however, is that Wendy's influence on Peter persists, even after she has grown old and can no longer travel to Neverland. As his only authentic mother figure, Wendy leaves a lasting effect on Peter's character, compelling him to return for her each year.

*Peter Pan*, then, is a text celebrating the powerful effect of a mother on a young boy, and her role in the development of a boy's masculinity. Indeed, because they finally find a mother, each of the Lost Boys grows up and becomes a successful man (153). In his study of British imperial masculinity, Jonathan Rutherford cites *Peter Pan* as "the culminating adventure story of the Victorian era," which "revealed what had been repressed and denied in the imperial fantasy of manly racial supremacy—the domestic world of mothers, sexuality, and emotional need" (25). Indeed, it was due to this repression and denial of the maternal that adult males of the time became known for their emotional immaturity and total narcissism—the elements of Edwardian masculinity primarily emphasized in the text. Captain Hook, Mr. Darling, and Peter are all embodiments of this type of character. Captain Hook is the "destructive" result of a boy who grew up without any maternal guidance; he is wildly immature, violent, and solipsistic (Mangan 202). Mr. Darling, however, is the text's illustration of a typical Victorian male: an antagonistic father who childishly asserts his dominance in the household to make up for his lack of power in

the business world; and an infantile man whose trouble with a tie reveals his extreme emotional instability. Peter, then, may be considered the young, careless boy within these adult male characters who keeps them from fully maturing. Nevertheless, the novel offers a solution for this masculinity crisis: not to fear the feminine authority in the domestic sphere and to embrace a maternal bond.

The implication, however, of creating a novel structured around the dominance of women solely in the domestic sphere, leads to a possible anti-feminist reading of the text, as suggested by many critics such as Susan Kissel and Mary Brewer. This view is complicated, however, by the text's blatant criticism of Victorian masculine ideals; indeed, readings of this text and others through the lens of masculinity have only recently emerged among criticism of children's literature (Stephens *x*). As John Stephens notes in the preface to *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film*, "to degender social relations requires the resignification of masculinity and femininity so that they are not bounded and oppositional concepts" (*xiv*). While Barrie's *Peter Pan* draws largely upon the themes conceived by the popular boys' adventure fiction of the time—books "aimed at...celebrating the British values of manhood" (Mangan 194)—Barrie, uses those themes in order to critique the values of manhood. Thus, such a reading of *Peter Pan*, as demonstrated by this analysis, offers an alternative way of thinking about masculinity within a patriarchal society, one which depends firmly on the presence of the feminine, rather than the repression or rejection of it.

## **PART TWO: THE ADAPTATIONS**

## Chapter 3

### A Brief Overview of Adaptation Theory

The second part of this thesis will focus on two film adaptations of J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*—Disney's 1953 animated film *Peter Pan* and P.J. Hogan's 2003 live-action film *Peter Pan*—in an effort to explore how those separate works engage with the original text, specifically focusing on their representations of masculinity. My argument about the portrayal of masculinity in the novel is built upon the way in which it critiques contemporary ideals of masculinity in Edwardian society. Therefore, I will consider the cultural and temporal surroundings of both adaptations, and how they influence the way in which masculinity—a prominent theme in the novel—is appropriated in each film. First, however, I will provide a brief introduction to the theory of adaptation, which will prove to be fruitful in how I later analyze the film adaptations of the literary text.

In an essay entitled "The Cinema," Virginia Woolf is largely critical of the medium of film. However, she admits that film "has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression," in the written word (381). In this regard, Woolf's 1926 essay can be understood as an early example of adaptation criticism, one that dates back to the conception of film itself. As Woolf suggests, films have an array of uniquely expressive techniques that lend themselves to the craft of storytelling. Yet, film theorist Linda Hutcheon reminds us that adaptations deploy the same narrative techniques of any literary storyteller: "They actualize or concretize ideas; they make simplifying selections, but also amplify and extrapolate; they make analogies; they critique or show their respect, and so on" (382). Thus, despite their many differences, at their cores, film and literature are both ways of sharing stories with the world. With regards specifically to an adapted film version of a literary work, however,

the technology involved in filmmaking is one of the ways in which the cinematic medium offers a diverse range of possibilities to the realm of storytelling.

It is significant that there is no unitary definition for the word *adaptation*. The Oxford English Dictionary defines adaptation with regards to media as “An altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now *esp.*) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source” (“adaptation”). It is interesting to note that adaptation, here, refers solely to the transposition of a narrative from one medium to another, with no specific reference to the alteration of the narrative itself. As adaptation theorists have demonstrated, however, the change does not merely happen on the level of medium, but also on level of creator. In an adaptation there are essentially two creators: the author of the original work, and the author of the adapted version, which seems to be just as significant to the final product, if not more so. George Bluestone, one of the most influential scholars of adaptation theory, would argue that the narrative itself takes on new meanings with each new adaptation.

Adaptation theory as a proper field of study first appeared in film and literary criticism in the 1950s, most notably in George Bluestone’s 1957 seminal work *Novels into Film*. In the study, Bluestone provides an examination into the aesthetic limits of both media (novel and film) as well as his own close readings of six film adaptations of acclaimed literary works. His findings led him to conclude that because of their inherently distinct media forms—with the novel being received through an internal consciousness and the film through an external observed reality—the cinematic adaptation of a written text is a wholly autonomous art form. This foundational work influenced later adaptation critics and laid the groundwork upon which to analyze and celebrate film adaptations, rather than simply to condemn them as the inferior, unoriginal derivatives of their literary source texts.

Many theorists, including Julie Sanders and Linda Hutcheon, believe the word *adaptation* itself refers to a variety of aspects involved in the concept of adaptation. For example, Sanders prefers to distinguish *adaptation* from *appropriation*, with the former signifying a work that directly refers to its relationship with the “informing sourcetext [sic] or original,” while in the case of the latter the original text is not as notably “signaled or acknowledged” (26). For example, she identifies a cinematic version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as an adaptation, but suggests *West Side Story*—which is influenced largely by Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*—is an appropriation, because it does not explicitly associate itself with its source text. Hutcheon, however, delves further into the definition of adaptation by citing three distinct perspectives on it (8): She suggests an adaptation can be seen as

- a *formal product*, or “an extensive transposition of a particular work or works”;
- the *process of creation* involving “both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation”;
- or the *process of reception*, or an audience’s “intertextual engagement” with the adaptation. (8)

These distinct perspectives represent three fundamental factors in identifying an adaptation as a separate work from its source text. Yet, of the three criteria, the most significant change from source text to adaptation lies in the *process of reception*. Here, Hutcheon uses the word “intertextual” to refer to an audience’s engagement with the adaptation. The nature of this engagement suggests that the adaptation, as a text, participates in and collaborates with a network of preceding texts; indeed, intertextuality is central to the study of adaptation.

The term “intertextual” was coined by literary theorist Julia Kristeva, and refers to the relationship between texts. In her groundbreaking work, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Kristeva draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin to argue “any text is

constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (66). Literature, then, participates in a process of evolution; a narrative evolves from earlier narratives, and in turn influences future narratives. Thus, adaptation theorists use the logic of intertextuality to defend and celebrate the “cooperative and collaborative model” of the adaptation, as opposed to associating it with theft or unoriginality (Sanders 4). Furthermore, literary theorist Roland Barthes borrowed from Kristeva’s concept to postulate the idea that meaning in a text does not depend solely on the author, but that “readers who [create] their own intertextual networks” enhance the production of meaning (2). Referring back to Bluestone’s initial idea, then, the adaptation remains separate from the source text insofar as the meaning of both is altered, as well.

Intertextuality, however, is not the only theory used to support adaptation theory. In the first of his three-volume series devoted to literature and film, Robert Stam identifies a multitude of theories that both directly and indirectly impact the way in which adaptations are perceived by critics and scholars of adaptation theory. For example, the concept of *narratology* offers a way of thinking about the significance of narrative “in general,” rather than placing “cultural centrality” on literary narrative alone. Stam explains, “for narratology, human beings use stories as their principal means of making sense of things...” (10). In many cases, the adaptation takes the narrative from the source text and “makes sense of it” in a separate temporal and cultural reality, as well as for a new range of spectators. Stam goes on to note the many other forms of narrative dominating our world today, including cartoons, TV commercials, and the evening news; thus, the novel can no longer be considered the superior form of narrative. As a result, the filmic adaptation has a “legitimate place alongside the novel, as just one more narratological medium”

(10). The key concept in understanding this logic is that the adaptation derives from its source text, but nevertheless creates a new, and also culturally and temporally separate, narrative.

Stam also cites *reception theory* as a useful tool for understanding the significant effect of a diverse audience, from source text to adaptation, on the produced meaning of a text. Derived from the work of the German scholar Hans-Robert Jauss in the late 1960s, reception theory claims that there is no “centralized” meaning of a text, but rather the meaning is formed by the individual reader’s (or spectator’s) experience of the text, and thus is always changing. An adaptation, then, fills the absence of meaning within the original source text by offering a new perspective of the narrative, suggesting a supplementary nature to adaptation rather than one of loss. Indeed, Stam criticizes the standard rhetoric regarding adaptations from novel to film, saying it “has often deployed an elegiac discourse of loss...while ignoring what has been ‘gained’” (3). In terms of reception theory, with each new “receptor” comes a new perspective or understanding of the narrative, a concept that was also realized by Roland Barthes in his pioneering essay, “The Death of the Author.” Barthes essentially “highlighted the ways in which texts were not solely dependent on their authors for the production of meaning” (Sanders 2). This concept also exposes the limitations of the critical argument that an adaptation often fails to capture the tone and/or attitude of the source text, which are ultimately determined by the particular creator of a work. The film adaptation and the novel have two entirely separate creators, with two different perspectives, thus making it nearly impossible for the adapter to capture what Stam calls the “spirit” or “self-presence” of the original author’s intention (9). Still, critics of adaptation theory continue to deem the film adaptation an inferior work to its literary source text, often relying on “fidelity criticism” to defend their claims.

The “Fidelity Dilemma” in film adaptation theory is centered around the idea that the film does not accurately recreate the world introduced by the original novel, an idea expressed commonly in the trite phrase, “I thought the book was better.” Adaptation theorists believe phrases such as this one evoke a sense of “unfaithfulness,” or “infidelity” on the part of the adaptation (Stam 14). Stam explains that when we read novels, we become personally invested in the imagined world our minds create from the novel; thus, we are disappointed when a film adaptation is unable to capture, or is not “better” than the narrative world we imagined. This common disappointment is problematic for a couple of reasons: first, it is impossible for a filmmaker to create an adaptation that likens to each reader’s personal conception of the story; second, as Stam maintains, there is no unitary “spirit” or “essence” to a novel, but rather the novel is “boundless,” open to ever-changing interpretations (14-15). Film theorist Linda Hutcheon also finds fault in fidelity criticism, saying that it implies that adapters aim solely to replicate the source text; instead, the adaptation is “repetition...without replication” (7). In other words, adaptations have the ability of preserving the original narrative while also offering and illuminating new perspectives on it. As Stam argues, for adapters, “complete originality is neither possible nor desirable” (9).

Despite an apparent disapproval of film adaptations among critics, there is no doubt of the success and critical acclaim of film adaptations in popular culture, with 85 percent of Oscar-winning Best Pictures being adaptations. Moreover, there is even an award dedicated to honoring and celebrating Best Adapted Screenplay. Praised and beloved films such as *Gone with the Wind*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, and *The English Patient* are adaptations of novels; and most recently, the 2016 Best Picture winner *Moonlight* was originally adapted for the screen from the play *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*. Linda Hutcheon believes the popularity of adaptations comes

“simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with piquancy of surprise” (4). In other words, fans of adaptations find comfort in the narratives they have previously encountered, and yet are pleasantly surprised with each new “variation” of the story. Simply put, the medium of film offers possibilities in storytelling that allow the narrative to thrive in ways the written word cannot, as initially suggested by Virginia Woolf.

In the introduction to his study of literature and film, Robert Stam dedicates a section to the impact of the digital revolution on adaptation theory. He reveals the way in which digital media undermine the notion of “original” and “copy”; because the images are stored as pixels on a computer, there is no identifiable “original,” making virtually everything “copyable” (12). As a result, “the language of ‘originality’ gives way to a language of cut ‘n’ mix and sampling” (12). Therefore, the images are essentially able to be reproduced freely. Moreover, cinematic techniques such as CGI (computer-generated imagery) and animation allow filmmakers to bring their “abstract dreams” to life, much like novelists do (Stam 12). Consider popular science fiction/fantasy films such as *Star Wars* and *Avatar*, in which a majority of the film is generated by digital imaging, rather than on-location shooting. Stam also identifies what digital media is able to illuminate about the process of adaptation: A CD-Rom “might easily juxtapose all the filmic adaptations of a given passage from *Great Expectations*. Or a morphing technique could have all the actresses who have played Emma Bovary blend into one another, or help us imagine an actress of a different ethnicity” (13). There is much more depth, then, to the possibilities offered by a digital rendering of a literary narrative than critics of the adaptation recognize.

One of the films to be discussed later in this paper is Disney’s animated *Peter Pan*, for which the discussion of digital imaging becomes significantly relevant. When Disney animators first began working on an animated version of the Peter Pan story, there was only one other

successful film adaptation of the novel. Released in 1924, this silent film version of *Peter Pan* was directed by Herbert Brenon and starred Betty Bronson as Peter, keeping with the stage tradition introduced by Barrie's play, with a girl always playing the narrative's leading boy. The decision to animate the film, however, gave Disney creators much more freedom in the design and tone of Barrie's classic tale, as Stam acknowledges, with the possibilities provided by digital imaging.

When discussing the concept of adaptation theory, the story of Peter Pan is particularly significant, given that it is one of the most widely adapted and appropriated works of literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In their essay about the "timelessness" of Peter Pan, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan say, "It is a story that is completely open to adaptation and its origins in drama particularly lend it to the medium of film" (93). Indeed, *Peter Pan* has had a lasting influence on Western society, as seen not only in the fact that it migrated from the stage to the screen, but also it gave its name to a peanut butter brand and a commercial bus line. Furthermore, Barrie created the character and story of Peter Pan through a process of adaptation. Pan first appeared as a supporting character in one of Barrie's earliest works, *Tommy and Grizel*, in 1900. From there, Barrie included hints and echoes of the original lost boy in nearly all of his works until he finally gave Peter his own title work in 1904, the play *Peter Pan; or, The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* (Billone xvi). In 1911, Barrie then adapted his own play into the novel *Peter and Wendy*, which is now referred to simply as, *Peter Pan*. Peter, then, evolved as an adaptation, never having been born of a single original work. In her essay about Disney's *Peter Pan*, Susan Ohmer writes, "'Peter Pan' is not a unitary narrative but one that is dispersed across various textual sites" (155). Subsequently, *Peter Pan* is an exemplar of intertextuality as he is comprised of the variety of works that came before him.

## Chapter 4

### The Patriarchy is Restored in Disney's 1953 *Peter Pan*

In the field of adaptation studies, scholars have begun to take into account the adaptation industry itself. Simone Murray, along with many others, believes that adaptation studies has become stagnant as a field of criticism, proposing that critics move beyond “unilluminating” textual comparative case-studies of book-film adaptations to account for matters concerning an adaptation’s production, financing, and audience reception (4). Moreover, as explained in the previous chapter, narratives are created and adapted in order to appeal to and reflect a diverse culture and time period—with regards to adaptations, the narrative is often reconfigured to reflect and appeal to the historical period of the adaptation’s creation. Although the narrative of Disney’s *Peter Pan*, is, like the novel, set in early-twentieth century England, the events are presented through the lens of the postwar United States, for spectators vastly different than the Edwardian audiences of Barrie’s play and novel. Therefore, in order to understand the ways in which Barrie’s view of masculinity in the novel translated into Disney’s animated version of *Peter Pan*, it is important to consider the time and place of the adaptation, as well as how the changes happening within Disney studios itself affected this new work.

#### Disney’s *Peter Pan* in Context

Disney’s production of *Peter Pan* took place during a tumultuous period both for the studio and in the United States. Disney first bought the rights to the animated version of the Peter Pan story in the late 1930s and it was not released until 1953; thus, the film’s production period encompassed the Depression, World War II, and the volatile and anxious postwar period (Ohmer 157). Moreover, the film was made at a time when the studio sought to expand beyond

animation, producing live-action films and television programs, as well as broadening its spectator reach by launching international coproductions. As Susan Ohmer remarks, “The very meaning of ‘Disney’ shifted rapidly in this period” (153). In “Disney’s *Peter Pan*: Gender, Fantasy, and Industrial Production,” Ohmer examines Disney’s animated adaptation of the Barrie classic, drawing significantly upon the cultural, economic, and industrial shifts that were taking place to better understand the specific ways in which the narrative of *Peter Pan* changed along with culture and society—from early-twentieth century Britain to the postwar U.S. Indeed, Disney’s adaptation includes major modifications to concepts that are integral to the original novel’s exploration and criticism of British ideals of masculinity. This is due in large part to the postwar image of the modern American family.

Postwar America saw a number of ideological shifts with regards to society and the family structure. In the years after World War II, the American economy grew significantly, which meant an increase in the number of middle-class families, as well as a surge in newborns. As a result, the 1950s marked a turn to a “new type of domesticity,” including the establishment of the “close-knit family” as it is known today (Hussung). In “The Evolution of American Family Structure,” Tricia Hussung explains:

The economic and global instability of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to the need for closely defined family units. This led to an ideology that lauded economic advancement and social order, the results of which were younger marriages that lasted longer, more children, fewer divorces and the nuclear family.

The concept of the “nuclear family” is one that gained momentum through popular American entertainment. Indeed, many popular television programs of the 1950s depicted an idyllic view of the perfect family unit, with the breadwinning father, stay-at-home mother, and obedient

children (ushistory.org). Despite the fact that only 60 percent of children grew up within such an “idyllic” patriarchal family structure, the image was nevertheless adopted and publicized by the American media (Hussung). Perhaps, then, the wish to uphold the contemporary ideals of “social order” and “stability” is one of the many reasons why Disney’s *Peter Pan* omits much of the criticism of the patriarchal family present in Barrie’s original work.

Not only did this cinematic adaptation of *Peter Pan* reflect the cultural shifts of American society, it also reflected the changing image of the “Disney” brand itself. The feature was not released until 20 years after Disney bought the rights to create an animated version of the story; as a result, the narrative’s “long journey to the screen occurred during a time of economic and aesthetic crisis at Disney” (Ohmer 157). The Disney studio conducted a large amount of research concerning audience reception of the film, beginning in 1943, in order to ensure its positive reception from the public. They commissioned a poll from the Audience Research Institute (ARI) that would help determine whether Disney should even proceed with the film’s production (158). Therefore, *Peter Pan* “is very much a film of its time,” much like Barrie’s original narrative (Crafton 34). In his analysis of Disney’s *Peter Pan*, Donald Crafton goes on to note that “the producers engaged in a systematic rewriting of the text to reflect attitudes and assumptions that prevailed during the project’s development in the 1940s, modifying it for a new pertinence” (34). More specifically, the film aims to reaffirm conservative ideals pertaining to the nuclear family values, gender, and sexuality. This is a much different sentiment than the one animating Barrie’s critique of his society’s family values. Therefore, many of the changes made to the narrative are related to the original story’s themes of masculinity, motherhood, and sexuality.

### Analyzing the Film

Disney's *Peter Pan* both presents a firmly patriarchal family structure and portrays Peter as embodying the model of masculinity Barrie worked to condemn in his novel. As we have seen, Barrie is explicit in his disapproval of fathers and the patriarchal family unit; instead, it is Mrs. Darling who implicitly holds the authority in the household, making his Darling family exclusively matriarchal. By reversing these roles, Disney undermines the significance of the mother figure that is central in Barrie's original novel. Moreover, the issue of Peter's own masculinity was a topic of great discussion among Disney animators, who concluded that their Peter must be noticeably "less effeminate" than Barrie's Pan (Ohmer 174). As a result, masculinity in the film is not depicted as being in crisis, but rather is glorified. At the same time, the role of the maternal figure in Neverland is still influential in Peter's ultimate defeat of Captain Hook, suggesting the significance of a mother's influence on a boy's development. We can see this primarily through the opening scenes between Mr. and Mrs. Darling, the way in which Disney made Peter more masculine, the saving influence Wendy has over Peter, and the film's patriarchal resolution.

Perhaps the character who transformed the most in this Disney rewrite is Mr. Darling. Unconvincingly "stern," and wildly immature, Barrie's Mr. Darling is the epitome of the inadequate masculinity that Barrie suggests characterized the majority of adult males in Edwardian England—one version of a man who strays away from his mother's care too early in his development. Disney's Mr. Darling, however, seems to embody the kind of practicality Barrie's Mr. Darling could only pretend to demonstrate. In his critique of the film, Brett T. McQuade argues, "By manipulating the father persona, Disney destroys the family structure in the work which nullifies much of the original humor caused by the inadequate male adult. It thus

disregards Barrie's primary motive for creating Peter Pan" (5). This seems to be a fair assessment, primarily because the faults of Disney's Mr. Darling do not stem from an inadequacy, but rather from quick-temperedness and impatience. When we are introduced to Mr. Darling, the voice-over narrator remarks, "Mr. Darling was a practical man," and rather than rendering it ironic, the film leads viewers to believe this statement. Despite being the center of some slapstick humor, Mr. Darling does not appear nearly as incompetent as Barrie's Mr. Darling, who would rather start an argument with his children than set a positive example by taking his medicine. In fact, Disney decided to omit the entire medicine fiasco as well as Mr. Darling's childish uproar over his tie. Disney's Mr. Darling does display a hint of immaturity as he searches for his cufflinks in a frenzy, and then finds his boys have turned his shirt into a treasure map—but not to such a degree as to illustrate that he is simply another child Mrs. Darling must care for. Instead, it is clear that Mr. Darling is the unequivocal head of this Darling household.

When comparing Barrie's Mr. Darling with Disney's reconfiguration of the character, Susan Ohmer remarks, "The father in the play descends to the children's level when he tries to avoid taking his medicine, but Disney's father is resolutely grown up, and wants everyone else to grow up, too" (169). This is perhaps the most significant difference between the characters. Disney, wanting to produce a film that reaffirms traditional family values, translated the immature and incompetent Mr. Darling into a patriarch who is still antagonistic to his children, but who does not exhibit the same childish attributes as Barrie's Mr. Darling, making him a "strong father figure" (McQuade 6). When Mr. Darling is introduced in the film, we see him through his bedroom window while he frantically rummages through his drawers for his missing cufflinks, preparing to leave for a party. He is visibly frustrated, and this is matched by his

hostile tone towards his wife, threatening that if he does not find his cufflinks, they will not go to the party. By appearance, Mr. Darling is intimidating and rigid, almost resembling a caricature of a “proper English gentleman,” with a large frame, exaggerated facial features, including a protruding jaw and nose, and thick eyebrows. He is still, then, the clear antagonist of this sequence.

When he later appears in the nursery, Mr. Darling immediately tells Michael and John to settle down from the game they are playing (they are pretending to battle one another as Peter Pan and Captain Hook), thus solidifying his role as the “grown-up.” Later in the scene, he finds that the boys have drawn all over his shirt, turning it into a treasure map, and he blames this on the idea that Wendy’s storytelling motivates the boys to misbehave. He then comes to the conclusion that Wendy must grow up, saying she is to move out of the nursery the following day. Whereas Barrie’s more insecure Mr. Darling believes he must prove himself as master of the household, there is no doubt of Disney’s Mr. Darling’s authority over his wife and children. Instead, he is troubled by the possibility of Wendy never growing up if she continues to tell stories about “Captain Crook and Peter Pirate.” When he banishes Nana from the nursery, it is because he believes her presence in the nursery encourages the children to remain immature; he reveals to her, “It’s nothing personal. It’s just that...you’re not really a nurse at all, you’re...a dog. And the children aren’t puppies, they’re people. And sooner or later, Nana, people have to grow up.” In the novel, Mr. Darling banishes Nana in an arbitrary effort “to show who was master in that house,” but Disney’s Mr. Darling is entirely confident in his role as “master” (Barrie 22). As a result, Mr. Darling appears to be a fairly ordinary father, who happens to have a big temper; he is “the effigy of a respected, mature adult in full control” (McQuade 7). This

restructured Mr. Darling has a great effect on the way in which Mrs. Darling's character is presented, as well.

Described in the novel as "the chief one," there is no doubt of Mrs. Darling's authority in the Darling household (Barrie 7). Not only is she responsible for "tidying up" the children's minds before bed, but she must also dress her infantile husband, as he is incapable of securing his own tie. McQuade remarks, "The social setup of the family in Barrie's play is primarily matriarchal" (5). The film, however, presents a considerably different portrait of the Darling matriarch. In order to ensure Mr. Darling's position as the "strong father figure," Mrs. Darling becomes an insignificant supporting character. First, she has very little dialogue: "Her longest lines are after Wendy compliments her on her evening gown, and these are rudely interrupted by Mr. Darling when he yells at Wendy" (McQuade 6). Furthermore, one of the ways in which Mary subtly asserts her dominance over Mr. Darling in the novel is by helping him with his tie, exposing his immaturity. In the film, however, Mr. Darling is not "managed or controlled by anyone" (McQuade 6). For instance, when Mary goes to help Mr. Darling with his tie, he backs away and fixes it himself. Perhaps the most compelling example of her diminished role in Disney's *Peter Pan* is when George and Mary are on their way to the party. Mary expresses concern about Peter Pan and the children's safety in light of the family's recent discussion of him. George, however, takes her concern as a sign that she is just as foolish as the children are, and scolds her for her "idiotic ideas": "Oh Mary, of all the impossible, childish fiddle-fiddle...How can we expect the children to grow up and be practical when you're as bad as they are? No wonder Wendy gets these idiotic ideas." Therefore, it is Mrs. Darling who is presented as the immature adult figure. More importantly, Mrs. Darling's strong maternal presence from which Wendy gathers her own maternal instinct, is nearly eradicated from the narrative, turning

Mrs. Darling into the complicit housewife commonly portrayed in a majority of popular entertainments of the time, such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* and *Father Knows Best*.

Peter's character also undergoes some change in the Disney film. Disney animators wanted Peter to appear "fully masculine," rather than the sexually ambiguous character of Barrie's novel. Ohmer cites a Disney story analyst who worked on *Peter Pan*'s production, Dorothy Blank, saying that she insisted Disney make their hero "all boy—fun, fierce, brave and a little tough" (174). Then, when faced with the decision to cast the voice of Peter, Disney immediately looked into hiring an adolescent boy, saying it was time to make Peter a "real boy" (Ohmer 174). Many of the film's critics and reviewers were happy about Peter's enhanced masculinity, calling the traditionally female-played character "fraudulent" in comparison to Disney's all-male Peter (Ohmer 178). Indeed, this is the Peter who appears in the film; even the way in which Wendy and Peter first become acquainted is changed. In the novel, we witness Peter crying at the foot of Wendy's bed, provoking Wendy to ask the novel's most memorable line, "Boy, why are you crying?" Disney's Peter, however, is too happy and carefree to ever cry in front of Wendy.

The filmmakers also take Peter's narcissism to new levels. First, he only visits Wendy to hear her tell stories about himself, and when she reveals that she must grow up, Peter is horrified because it means she will not tell any more stories about him. Thus, he insists that she must go to Neverland to ensure she remains youthful; this is not for her sake, but for his own. In her analysis of this new Peter, Ohmer notes:

Rather than beginning a romance, this Peter seems indifferent to girls in general and just wants [Wendy] to come to Neverland to entertain him. In the play Peter flatters Wendy

and makes her feel needed; in the film he seems merely to think it would be amusing to have her around. (174)

Evidently, Disney's idea of a "real boy" goes beyond being "fun, fierce, and brave"; he is also rather selfish. Later in the film when Peter takes Wendy to the mermaid's lagoon, the mermaids torture Wendy and try to drown her. Wendy attempts to defend herself, desperately fighting them off. Peter eventually interferes, all the while laughing, and tells Wendy, "They were just having a little fun! Weren't you girls?" Thus, there is no uncertainty surrounding Peter and Wendy's relationship; while it is clear that Wendy likes Peter romantically, Peter does not show any indication that he acknowledges or reciprocates her feelings. This asexual representation is the one which appealed the most to Disney animators and even audiences; when discussing how they wanted their protagonist to appear to audiences, senior animators insisted on Peter not being a "sissy" (174). This comment along with Peter's disregard for Wendy's apparent crush on him, suggests that Disney's idea of "all boy," means that he cannot love, and that his feelings for Wendy must remain purely platonic. Despite the obvious changes to Peter's masculinity, bringing Wendy to the island still elicits some sensitivity in Peter's character.

Wendy is undoubtedly the maternal figure in this narrative, and as such, she implicitly influences Peter's behavior. Consider the scene in the novel in which, as Wendy approaches the island for the first time, Tootles accidentally shoots her down. The film covers this scene, but rather than having Tootles shoot Wendy, Peter saves her before she is hit by the arrow—Cartmell and Whelehan note their first impression of the film is that it is less violent than the source text and "the threat of death is removed" (98). Furious at Tink's attempt to have Wendy killed, Peter banishes her forever, to which Wendy remarks, "Please, not forever!" causing him to reduce the sentence to one week. From this moment, Wendy continues to influence Peter, even saving him

multiple times from being caught by Hook. In the two battle sequences between Hook and Peter, Wendy warns Peter before Hook sneaks up on him, suggesting Wendy to be a kind of savior for Peter. In the film's most explicit homage to motherhood, Wendy sings a song, "Your Mother and Mine," to the Lost Boys, explaining to them what a mother is, and how important it is to have one. Ohmer notes that this song, as well as Wendy's role as the maternal figure, was purposefully included to please the film's female viewers (167). During the song, Wendy wipes away the Native American makeup from Michael's face, and the rest of the boys follow suit, each cleaning his own face, clearly influenced by Wendy's maternal authority. Once the song is over, all of the boys agree they want to return to England so that they, too, can each have a mother. Moreover, the song solidifies Wendy as the primary maternal figure in Neverland, and marks a change in Peter's narcissistic character.

Preceding Hook and Peter Pan's final battle, Peter embraces the emotions he has largely repressed up until this moment, including his care for his friends and for Wendy. Tinkerbell injures herself while trying to save Peter from a bomb Hook planted in his home, leaving her buried under a pile of debris. She tells him Hook has Wendy and the boys, to which Peter responds in distress, "But I've gotta save you first!...Don't you understand, Tink? You mean more to me than anything in this whole world." This is a considerably different side to the Peter who was just hours before willing to banish Tink from the island forever. Indeed, it seems to suggest that Wendy's presence has had an implicit effect on Peter, influencing him to care more about others than himself. In this sequence, Captain Hook, uses Peter's loyalty to Wendy as a way to trick him into waiting for the bomb to go off—Hook hides the bomb in a wrapped box with a note signed by Wendy saying to wait until 6:00p.m. to open it, and Peter obeys the request; Peter is unaware, however that the bomb is set to go off at that time. Yet, whereas

Captain Hook believes Wendy's influence over Peter to be a disadvantage for him, it is Peter's vulnerability and his care for his fellow comrades that ultimately allow him to defeat Hook.

Therefore, the film does seem to celebrate the positive influence of a mother on a young boy.

That being said, the film's resolution ultimately advocates for a firmly patriarchal family unit.

When the film returns to the Darling nursery, we learn that the children have only been away for the duration of Mr. and Mrs. Darling's party, whereas in the novel they are in the Neverland for several months; thus, as Cartmell and Whelehan point out, the parents' pain for the loss of their children is noticeably missing from the narrative. Mrs. Darling does reveal that Mr. Darling has changed his mind about Wendy moving out of the nursery, but there is no indication that he regrets treating her harshly; instead, he simply replies, "Sure Mary, you know I never mean those things." As a result, Mr. Darling does not have the opportunity to reflect on his behavior, and he returns home believing he has done nothing wrong. In the novel, however, Mr. Darling comes to blame himself for the children's disappearance, and punishes himself by imprisoning himself in Nana's cage. The omission of the remorseful father reinforces the idea that the film aims to celebrate fatherhood and to present audiences with a strong, mature father figure. What is more, Mr. Darling sees Peter's pirate ship sailing over the moon, evoking a childhood memory as he reminisces, "I have the strangest feeling I've seen that ship before, a long time ago, when I was very young." This moment of Mr. Darling's temporary regression to his own youth and into his imagination makes him a more relatable character for audiences. In a reading of the film's final scene, Donald Crafton argues, "The message seems to be that fathers are capable of warm, understanding relationships with their children... Thus we learn that fantasy and the imaginary sometimes are allowable masculine indulgences" (38). Furthermore, Mr. Darling's reminiscence of his boyhood is the final line of the film, while its final image is of

Mrs. Darling and Wendy on either side of him, embracing him—a portrait of the nuclear family. The novel's resolution is much different. It glimpses into the future as generations of Darling females travel to the Neverland to be Peter's "mother," ultimately presenting the image of a continuing matriarchy. The film's resolution, however, decidedly works to support the idea of patriarchy: "...we are left with the feeling that patriarchy has been restored and that the women are now in good hands" (Cartmell and Whelehan 100). Despite the few moments suggesting the powerful influence of a mother on a child's development, the film does not glorify motherhood in the way Barrie's text does; instead, it aims to create a strong paternal presence in order to reinforce ideals of social order during the time.

According to Susan Ohmer's research on *Peter Pan*'s critical reception, the film was a hit among contemporary audiences:

*Peter Pan* was a huge success at the box office, and the studio credited the film with increasing its revenue more than 10 percent over the previous year. At 8 A.M. on opening day at the Roxy theater in New York, the ticket line extended down the street, and 17,500 people saw the film by late afternoon. In Washington, D.C., the film played for nine weeks at the Keith, two weeks longer than *Cinderella*, and a record for that theater. (176)

The success is undoubtedly a result of the film's incredibly long and meticulous production process, during which numerous surveys were conducted both internally—among Disney Studios employees—as well as in the public. In turn, nearly all of the decisions made during the film's production were aimed to reflect the desires of Disney's audiences, as well as the Disney brand itself. Ohmer describes the 1940s and 1950s to be not only a time of "transition in public tastes," but also one in which Disney Studios itself was working to appeal to "a new generation of children and to adults adjusting to postwar culture" (176). As this analysis reveals, many of

Disney's final decisions unsurprisingly affect the original narrative's representation of masculinity and maternity; this is most likely due to the fact that this adaptation was produced in a time and place starkly different than Barrie's own Edwardian London. Thus, while the film seemingly "fails to capture the spirit and mood of Barrie's tale," as Brett T. McQuade laments, it does seem to have captured the sentiments and attitudes of its target audiences, as proven by its nationwide success after its release.

## Chapter 5

### **“What are your real feelings?”: A Masculinity Defined by Sexuality in P.J. Hogan’s *Peter Pan***

For the centennial anniversary of Barrie’s beloved play, *Peter Pan*, fans of the story were gifted their first live-action feature film adaptation in P.J. Hogan’s *Peter Pan* (2003). Hogan, a big fan of the narrative himself, aimed to remain faithful to the original text. In an interview with Jeff Otto for IGN.com, Hogan revealed why he chose to follow the original story more closely than had previous adaptations of it: “I think it is a masterpiece...It’s an adventure, a tragedy, a romance...And I think that it has something for everybody and it’s moving in ways that you don’t expect it to be moving” (Otto n.pag.). Hogan, however, introduced new concepts and moments in the film that were not as prominent in the original text, in order for the film to remain relevant to a contemporary audience. As a result, the final product is a highly sexualized version of the narrative that is presented primarily through the relationships between each of the film’s principal characters, Peter, Wendy and Captain Hook.

#### Hogan’s *Peter Pan* in Context

In J.M. Barrie’s novel *Peter Pan*, masculinity is marked by an inadequacy that can only be fulfilled by the love and emotional bond of a mother. About half a century later, Disney’s animated *Peter Pan* does not present a masculinity in crisis, but rather one that is intact. The film upholds a portrait of the mature, breadwinning father, Mr. Darling, and his supportive, submissive wife; meanwhile, Peter has become noticeably more masculine and is “all boy,” removing any issues of sexual ambiguity that the Disney animators believed surfaced in the

original text. Half a century after Disney and exactly one hundred years after Barrie, we have P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan*. Unlike both Barrie and Disney, Hogan allows his Peter to reach the threshold of sexuality through a shared kiss between him and Wendy; moreover, sexual tension is present in many of relationships between the film's primary characters. Thus, for Hogan, masculinity seems to be defined by a boy's acceptance of his sexuality, and growing up seems to be more about "the dance towards and away from emotional commitment" (Munns 223). As such, it is his romantic love for Wendy that Peter represses the most in his quest for eternal youth. Like the previous Pan adaptations, Hogan's was inevitably influenced by contemporary ideals of masculinity.

In his analysis of Hogan's film, David P.D. Munns acknowledges the historical appropriation of Peter Pan as a sexual object, from Barrie's original Peter in 1904 to later adaptations of the character. He believes Peter's increased sexuality has to do with a basic change in the understanding of sexuality: "In the century since the first stage production of *Peter Pan*, the age at which we believe children become sexual has been steadily driven downward" (223). In Hogan's film, Wendy and Peter are around twelve years old; for a modern audience, then, the characters are not quite children, but on the verge of being teenagers, the age most associated with fluctuating hormones and budding sexuality (223). This is a fairly different understanding from one century earlier: "popular culture, until the 1950s, almost entirely portrayed all-American teenagers delaying even the thought of pursuing heterosexual encounters until they are eighteen" (227). Therefore, Hogan's *Peter Pan* reaffirms modern ideas about sexuality and its significance in the process of maturation.

Despite the current cultural perception that children are learning to come to terms with their sexuality at a younger age, adult men still struggle to meet contemporary demands

regarding emotional commitment. From a young age, men receive contradictory messages about what defines masculinity from all facets of society: parents, schools, the media, church, and most importantly, women. In his study of contemporary masculinity, Michael Mangan cites an empirical survey done by sociologist Ian M. Harris in the first half of the 1990s, in which over 500 men of a variety of ages, ethnic groups and class backgrounds, responded to a list of 24 gender-role messages. Harris believed these messages “set the standards for appropriate male behavior” over the past 50 or so years (207). The messages are distinguished between “classical” labels and more modern labels of masculine gender norms. For example, the label “Playboy,” which indicates that a man should be sexually aggressive, is marked as a classical label, while “Faithful Husband,” is a modern one; yet, both constitute current messages that define masculinity (207-208). Thus, given these contradictory definitions of manhood, the instability surrounding contemporary masculinity seems justified. Sociologist Michael Kimmel refers to these mixed messages as “misframings,” and believes they will “continue to lead young men away from a confident, secure sense of themselves as men,” which will inevitably affect their romantic relationships, as well (3).

In his study, *Misframing Men: The Politics of Contemporary Masculinity*, Kimmel considers further the instability permeating contemporary ideals of what it means to be a man. He paints a troubled picture of men who are “buffeted by changes not of their making, increasingly anxious in an economic and political arena that erodes their ability to be breadwinners, and confused by new demands about emotional responsiveness and involved fatherhood” (2). In other words, men are struggling with the expectation to be equal providers as well as equal emotional partners with their female counterparts. Ironically enough, the struggle for men to adequately articulate their feelings was outlined in Dan Kiley’s popular psychological

study, *The Peter Pan Syndrome*, in 1983. In the introduction to his study, Kiley characterizes the “victims” of this syndrome as “incapable of functioning in society,” and names one of their identifying features as “emotionally paralyzed,” meaning they “have lost touch with their emotions and simply *don't know* what they feel” (4, 8-9). Almost thirty years later, and Kimmel still discusses similar issues in men who have difficulty meeting the demands of emotional maturity, especially as a husband and father. Therefore, through the decision to focus specifically on Peter's sexual immaturity Hogan's *Peter Pan* both captures contemporary contradictions about masculinity and builds upon the fact that social thinkers have used Peter Pan as a vehicle for articulating those contradictions

Kimmel examines how the feminist movement of the second half of the twentieth century affected this unstable sense of masculinity in the twenty-first century. In recent decades, women have become more present in areas of life that were historically exclusively male; specifically, in the workforce (Kimmel 15). What this really means, however, is that women emerge as equal, if not primary, breadwinners in the family. According to Kimmel, for men, the loss of their exclusive roles as breadwinners is a “seismic shift, shaking some men's identity to its foundation,” and is a major reason why “many contemporary observers see a ‘crisis’ of masculinity” (17-18). Building on this premise, Kimmel contends that the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a masculinity plagued by anti-feminist rebellion, with men fighting back against four decades of feminist activism and publicly warning against the dangers of gender equality (3). In effect, this “misframing” only makes it harder on young men to mature “in an increasingly complex and equal world” (3). This contemporary anxiety surrounding notions of masculinity parallels the similar anxieties experienced by early-twentieth-century British men; and for both, the increasing authority of women—whether it be in the labor force or in the

home—is the driving force behind that anxiety. In *Peter Pan*, Hogan engages directly with issues of gender equality through his reimagined Wendy, who is much more than a “maternal figure”; instead, she is fierce, adventurous, and equally as significant to the defeat of Captain Hook as Peter is.

Hogan’s *Peter Pan*, then, is very much a film of its time. While the film does a good job at remaining faithful to Barrie’s original story, there are events and plotlines introduced which cater towards a more modern audience, dealing directly with the contemporary issues mentioned above: sexuality, masculinity, and gender equality. In particular, Hogan’s *Peter Pan* depicts masculinity as dependent upon a man’s acceptance of his sexuality as well as his capacity to love and to be loved. For Peter, it is not his repression of maternal guidance that hinders the development of his masculinity, but his repression of romantic love. After all, with romantic love comes the prospect of motherhood and fatherhood; in this way, it seems as though embracing sexuality and emotional commitment is the doorway to adulthood. Thus, Wendy is presented more as a potential lover to Peter than a mother figure, and Peter feels threatened by her advances because he intuits what may happen should he reciprocate Wendy’s love. Moreover, the film’s overt support of gender equality suggests it to be a critique of the early-twenty-first century anti-feminist rebellion among men. I will now examine five significant moments<sup>1</sup> which primarily illustrate the film’s engagement with these issues: Peter and Wendy’s first meeting, the fairy dance, Captain Hook and Wendy’s dinner, Wendy’s induction into piracy, and the final battle.

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<sup>1</sup> Missing from this analysis, which has been significant to my previous analyses, is the film’s characterization of Mr. Darling. The film omits many of the moments emphasizing Mr. Darling’s immaturity and replaces them with new scenes featuring a new character, Aunt Millicent. This is done so in order to draw less attention to Mr. and Mrs. Darling and to place more significance on Wendy and her transition into womanhood. Therefore, he is not a significant element of this film’s representation of masculinity.

### Analyzing the Film

Through its depiction of Wendy and Peter's relationship, the film presents itself as one not only about the anxiety of growing up, but also about the beginnings of sexuality. This is clear from the moment Peter first examines Wendy's face as she sleeps peacefully in her bed. The scene opens with an aerial-view close-up of a sleeping Wendy; her hair falls in ringlets around her head and her face is pointed straight up towards the ceiling. The camera slowly zooms in and her face nearly fits the entire frame; then, two grubby fingers enter the bottom of the frame as they just brush over Wendy's lower lip—we realize that we are seeing Peter's point of view. The shot then cuts to a view of Peter hovering over Wendy, adopting the point of view of Wendy's position. He tilts his head like a confused dog would as he studies her curiously before she snaps open her eyes, and then flies backward onto the ceiling, either because he is afraid or simply caught off guard. What is significant in this brief moment is Peter's hand; he is not curious about Wendy's eyebrows or her nose, but about her lips. It is the film's way of opening up the possibility of a romantic relationship between Peter and Wendy. The first time in which they truly meet, however, further strengthens this possibility.

On the night Peter studies Wendy, his shadow accidentally gets stuck in the nursery, thus, giving him a reason to return. When he does so, Wendy discovers him at the foot of her bed failing to stick his shadow onto his foot with a bar of soap. Just as she does in Barrie's play, Wendy tenderly asks Peter, "Boy, why are you crying?" The shot itself foreshadows a growing love between the two. The camera is positioned at the foot of the bed on the floor, tilted up towards the base of the bedframe, which is marked by a carved-out heart in the middle; Wendy then appears in the frame, her face first shown passing across the heart and then peering over the

bedframe at the crying boy dressed in leaves on her floor. The heart undoubtedly signifies romance, and the sexual attraction felt between the two characters.

Later in the scene, Peter upsets Wendy by not acknowledging her help in reattaching his shadow. Wendy, frustrated, goes back to bed and pulls the covers over her head. Peter, understanding that he has made Wendy feel bad, climbs onto her bed and whispers closely in her ear, “Wendy, one girl is worth more than twenty boys.” Then, he begins talking about the Lost Boys, which immediately excites Wendy, who pops out of bed, pushing Peter off as she does so, and continues to question Peter about them. She asks him, “Are there girls, too?” To this, Peter responds charmingly, “Girls are much too clever to fall out of their prams,” as he bends down to the base of her bedframe and grins at her, almost seductively, through the carved-out heart, once again; the shot then cuts to a parallel shot of Wendy on the bed, smiling at Peter through the heart. “Peter, it is perfectly lovely the way you talk about girls,” Wendy responds, “I should like to give you a kiss.” Peter, however, is too naïve to even know what a kiss is, and sticks his hand out, waiting for her to give him an actual object. Thus, it is clear that Wendy is much more sexually mature than Peter is—this quality seems to distinguish Wendy as a growing girl and Peter as a permanent child. Peter’s acknowledgement of Wendy’s sexual advances would also signify his maturity and growth; instead, he remains blissfully ignorant of her advances.

Nevertheless, this scene demonstrates the lengths to which the film goes to convince viewers of a budding romance between the two characters. Significant here is the close proximity in which the actors are placed in relation to one another; at first, Wendy advances towards Peter when she first asks why he was crying, eventually coming so close their noses almost touch; then, Peter whispers in Wendy’s ear to get her to come out of bed; finally, they almost kiss, though that is prevented by Tinkerbell’s jealous rage. Thus, Hogan is thorough in his

demonstration of Peter and Wendy's attraction for one another; his direction and staging in this scene is just as significant as his and Michael Goldenberg's captivating dialogue.

Subsequently, once in the Neverland, Wendy and Peter share a touching moment in the forest together, dancing among the fairies. This is one of the scenes in the film that did not appear in the original text. It works to emphasize Peter's refusal of emotional commitment, which keeps him from becoming a man. While the Lost Boys are still at a celebration on the Indian campgrounds, Peter entices Wendy to join him in the forest, where he leads her to the fairy tree. There, they watch the king and queen of the fairies gracefully dance, all the while stealing glances at one another. Finally, Peter offers Wendy his hand, and guides her to the side where they hesitantly position themselves to dance, mirroring the fairies. They begin to dance, awkwardly at first, until Peter gently pushes Wendy upward and meets her in the air, where they continue to float around one another, all the while encircled by hundreds of glowing fairies.

As Wendy and Peter dance, floating up towards the moon, we seem to feel their growing love for one another; Peter, too, seems to feel the palpable sincerity of the moment, and quickly tries to dismiss it by asking, "Wendy, it's just make believe, isn't it? That you and I are..." unable to utter the words that frighten him the most. Wendy, looking heartbroken, floats back down to the ground as Peter follows. "You see," he explains, "it'd make me seem so old to be a real father." What follows is the film's most compelling and significant exchange, especially in its characterization of Peter and Wendy's relationship. Once on the ground, Wendy launches an interrogation into Peter's emotions: "Peter," she asks, "What are your real feelings?" Taken aback, Peter physically begins to step away from Wendy, repeating, "Feelings?" as if he is unaware of what they are. "What you feel," Wendy prods, "Happiness, sadness, jealousy, anger...love?" Peter, looking offended, replies, "Love? I have never heard of it." Wendy,

however, can sense that Peter may be hiding something, “I think you have, Peter. I daresay you felt it yourself. With something? Or someone.” As Peter steps closer towards Wendy, he whispers in her ear defiantly, “Never. Even the sound of it offends me.” Wendy, then, reaches her hand out to touch Peter’s face, perhaps in an effort to show him what he so insistently claims he does not know, but Peter runs backwards, almost frightened.

PETER: Why do you spoil everything? We have fun, don’t we? I taught you to fight and to fly. What more could there be?

WENDY: There is so much more.

PETER: What? What else is there?

WENDY: I don’t know. I think it becomes clearer when you grow up.

PETER: Well I will not grow up. You cannot make me. I will banish you like Tinkerbell.

WENDY: I will not be banished!

PETER: Then go home! Go home and grow up, and take your feelings with you!

As he gives his final say, Peter flies off, leaving Wendy alone in a forest much darker than when they first arrived.

As iterated, this sequence is particularly significant to the film’s development of a romantic attraction between Peter and Wendy, a concept that was never fully realized in Barrie’s original novel. Throughout the exchange, it is clear that Peter knows what love is—despite his forceful denial—but he fiercely rejects it. When Wendy tells Peter there is “so much more,” it is implied she means romantic love. She understands that in accepting love, one must grow up, which is why Peter so vehemently denies it. What is more, when Peter claims that being a real father would make him seem old, he is implicitly acknowledging the fact that loving Wendy may lead to fatherhood. In representing Peter’s own struggle with feelings, the film seems to agree with Michael Kimmel and Dan Kiley, who suggest that an important factor in developing a stable, mature masculinity is to learn to accept emotions. Love, here, is a powerful emotion that arguably threatens Peter’s sense of boyhood more than any other.

This sequence, however, does not only establish romantic love as a threat to Peter's eternal youth; it also situates Captain Hook's role within the film's depiction of an undeveloped masculinity through the repression of sexuality. Interwoven between Peter and Wendy's dance and exchange are images of Hook in the forest with them, first watching forlornly as Peter and Wendy dance, then listening intently to their subsequent debate. Hook, unlike Pan, exudes sexuality, and as Lester D. Friedman notes, "seems as much a rival for Wendy's affections as a challenge to Peter Pan" (204). Indeed, when Wendy first lays eyes on Hook, "the dark figure who haunted her stories," she "saw the piercing eyes, and was not afraid, but entranced." For Wendy, Hook represents a mature masculinity not embodied by Peter; Hook initially succeeds in seducing her, and it is because she finds him "to be a man of feeling," as she later tells Peter. It is not until the fairy dance scene, however, when Hook sees Wendy for the first time; and consequently, learns Peter's darkest secret. Through this scene, as David P.D. Munns notes, "Hogan makes Wendy's desire for Peter, and Peter's inability to return that desire, into an advantage for Hook, who seduces Wendy with the pretense of adult male sexuality..." (237). After Peter flies off, Hook follows Wendy to the tiny home the Lost Boys made for her, and has his men put her house aboard the Jolly Roger while she is sleeping.

To her surprise, Wendy wakes up on the pirate ship. She follows the sound of Hook singing and playing the piano, which leads her to his quarters—as if he is luring her with his music. Hook and Wendy then sit down for dinner, and he jumps right into a conversation about growing up, "a barbarous business," he says. "Things were simpler when I was younger," Wendy laments, looking downward. "And then the mess starts," Hook interjects sympathetically, "and the feelings come. Pan is so lucky to be untroubled by them." He looks away, innocently, and takes a sip from his mollusk shell cup, as Wendy looks at him curiously, not fully understanding

what Hook means. “Oh no,” he reveals, becoming serious, “he cannot love. It’s part of the riddle of his being.” He uses Barrie’s phrase in the novel, referring to the sacrifices Peter must make in order to remain “gay, innocent, and heartless,” for eternity (Barrie 159); in this case, he must sacrifice love. Thus, this scene works to reinforce the film’s position that it is Peter’s repression of sexuality that keeps him from realizing his sense of manhood. Expanding upon this idea, Friedman notes that Peter’s “dominant masculine trait is his self-congratulatory cockiness, his arrogant assumption that he possesses the freedom to act precisely as he pleases” (202). Hook, being Pan’s ultimate adversary, represents the alternate side of the spectrum, possessing a masculinity marked by hypersexuality. The tragedy of Hook, however, is that he seeks the admiration of others, even Wendy’s, but it remains unreciprocated. His identification as “alone and unloved” is what results in his own destructive masculinity.

After Hook’s heartbreaking revelation, he takes advantage of Wendy’s vulnerable state and invites her into piracy—another added scene in the narrative. To become a pirate is, of course, the ultimate betrayal; and Wendy’s decision to assume the name “Red-Handed Jill” signifies her autonomy and the agency. Thus, she is far removed from the solely maternal Wendy in both Barrie’s and Disney’s versions. Indeed, a major reason why the film does not emphasize the theme of motherhood as much as previous versions of the story do is because Wendy is not solely a maternal figure. Instead, she seems more an action heroine who is not afraid to sword-fight Peter Pan himself, let alone a pirate. “Who be you to call me girly?,” she shouts furiously as she lifts her sword to fight a pirate who was mocking her moments before. Thus, Hogan’s Wendy immediately distinguishes herself from previous iterations of her character by fighting alongside the boys, rather than watching from afar. Moreover, through Wendy’s characterization, the film offers its critique of a model of masculinity that insists on rebelling against feminism

and gender equality—an issue that was particularly relevant in the media as well as in politics in the early years of the twenty-first century (Kimmel 3). As such, the male characters in the film are unfazed by Wendy’s sword-fighting. In fact, they encourage it, especially Peter, who initially hands her the sword at the Black Castle and expects her to be able to use it. What is more, Wendy, as an equal, does not pose a threat to Peter’s boyhood, nor his masculinity; rather it is her love for him that threatens his eternal youth.

The final battle between Peter Pan and Captain Hook becomes as much mental as physical. During their battle, Hook performs “a miraculous feat denied all his literary and cinematic predecessors: he flies!” (Friedman 208). He grabs Tinkerbell and furiously shakes her fairy dust over him—the secret to being able to fly—and he is soon airborne, flying aggressively towards Peter. As Friedman accurately notes, this “makes Hook and Pan relatively equal antagonists,” for Peter always had the advantage of flight until then (208). Hook, then, uses this advantage in order to strike Peter psychologically and emotionally. “You’re a tragedy!” he bellows, and begins his sad tale, “She was leaving you, Pan. Your Wendy was leaving you. Why should she stay? What have you to offer? You are incomplete. She’d rather grow up than stay with you. Let us now take a peek into the future. What’s this I see? Tis the fair Wendy. She’s in her nursery. The window is shut.” “I’ll open it!” Peter pleads, becoming more and more distressed by Hook’s words. For the first time, we realize Peter truly is just a boy. “There is another in your place...He is called husband”: Hook’s final verbal blow before he thrusts Peter onto the deck of the ship, causing the pirates, the Lost Boys, and Wendy to stop their fighting and stare. Just before he is about to plunge his hook into the immobile and powerless Pan, Hook mutters, “You will die alone and unloved...Just like me.” This sequence and the series of Hook’s

fatal insults reveals that Peter, indeed, does feel love for Wendy; however, the prospect of Wendy replacing him will, as Hook predicts, leave him as bitter and cruel as Hook himself.

Hook, however, grants Wendy a last farewell, as he throws her onto the deck next to Peter. Lying there, Wendy looks at Peter achingly and says, “Peter, I am sorry I must grow up.” Then, sitting up, Wendy looks at Peter and puts her hand on his cheek, leans close to his ear, and whispers, “This belongs to you, and always will.” Finally, she leans in and kisses him softly on the lips, to everyone’s astonishment. Pulling away, the camera focuses solely on a close-up of Peter’s face, which begins to turn a bright pink as his smile grows wider; then, Pan screams and explodes into the air, blasting away the pirates surrounding him. After hovering in the air for a few moments in ecstasy, he glides back down, picks up his and Hook’s swords and hands the latter to an incredulous Hook, readying himself to fight. This particular moment is what distinguishes Hogan’s *Peter Pan* from previous versions of the narrative. As Friedman explains, “kissing...inevitably plants one on the path to sexuality, a traditional line of demarcation between childhood and adulthood...Hogan allows Peter a glimpse into the joys of physical contact” (210). As a result, Peter is physically and emotionally empowered, further suggesting the significance of a young boy’s acceptance of sexuality to his maturity.

At the end of the film, the children return to their nursery and the Darlings adopt the rest of the Lost Boys, just as they do in Barrie’s novel. Peter, of course, returns to Neverland, but it is not an entirely happy ending. As Wendy, her brothers, and the Lost Boys celebrate their return with their parents, Peter watches their happiness from the window, realizing he will never know that kind of joy. The narrator says, “Peter Pan had countless joys that other children could never know. But he was looking at the one joy from which he must be forever barred.” Then, Peter exclaims with tears in his eyes, “To live would be an awfully big adventure.” It is, as Hook says,

the riddle of his being. In order to remain a boy, he can never have a family, be in love, and truly live.

In his review of Hogan's *Peter Pan*, famed film critic Roger Ebert starts by saying, "I'm not sure how to describe this 'Peter Pan' to you. It's so different from what I expected" (Ebert n.pag.). Indeed, it is far from the "sweet kiddie fantasy" Ebert was originally expecting to see. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Hogan does not shy away from delving into the messiness that is masculinity and sexuality. He worked to bring Barrie's wonderfully tragic boy to life, including the many contradictions that come with his story; a tale that is both magical and frightening, romantic and tragic, exciting and heartbreaking. In his analysis of Barrie, Munns notes that "Barrie's experience with children resulted in his downplaying the ideal of innocent childhood in favor of a three-dimensional characterization of children that recognizes their humanity" (227). Hogan's *Peter Pan* succeeds at illustrating the portrait of a boy whose only tragedy is also his biggest joy. Thus, despite the "impossibility" of an adaptation capturing the spirit or essence of an original work, Hogan nearly convinces it is possible to do so.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

I was around eleven or twelve years old when I watched P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan* for the first time, and I remember thinking: this is what magic looks like, sounds like, and feels like. I was instantly captivated by the film's stunning visual effects, alluring color schemes, and the enchanting world of the Neverland. Not only was the film visually beautiful, but the score, brilliantly composed by James Newton Howard, was unlike any musical score I had heard before. What surprised me, however, was how the film made me feel. At first, I was laughing along with the children as they flew joyfully into space to Neverland, and then I was crying with Peter as he desperately tried to revive Tinkerbell. After all, Disney's *Peter Pan* never made me want to cry. Yet, at the end of Hogan's film, as Peter looks into the nursery at the Darling family and the Lost Boys from outside the window with tears in his eyes, I could no longer hold in the thick lump that had formed in my throat. Being a child, I was struck by this revelation: Peter Pan, the boy who could remain young forever, is, in fact, a tragedy.

About ten years later, I am still struck by how vivid my emotions are when I watch Hogan's *Peter Pan*, as if I am experiencing it for the first time. Thus, when it came time to consider possible thesis topics, there was no doubt that I would write about Peter Pan; and one of the first questions I asked myself when I began brainstorming was: What makes the story of *Peter Pan* so sad? This initial inquiry eventually led to the major questions my thesis investigates: Why does Peter stay young forever? What keeps him from growing up and becoming a man? After reading the novel again, keeping these questions in mind, it became clear that the presence of the maternal figure, Wendy, allows the Lost Boys and Peter to develop and

mature. Subsequently, it is Peter's rejection of Wendy, as a mother, that keeps him from ever growing up.

In researching the history of Barrie's Victorian/Edwardian society, I was interested in studying how Barrie's *Peter Pan* was relevant to his culture and society, particularly with regards to ideologies of masculinity and domesticity. As we have seen, Barrie's *Peter Pan* draws largely upon the standard model of the patriarchal family in Victorian England and its effect on the development of young boys into men. Thus, the narrative itself is rooted in an image of family life that should seem obsolete to audiences one hundred years after the original play's conception. What, then, makes *Peter Pan* relevant to contemporary audiences?

A few of the sources used for this thesis contain words and phrases in their titles such as, "timelessness," "immortal," and "one hundred years of *Peter Pan*." At the core of the narrative lies a tale "about the boundaries between childhood and adulthood," a universal concept that is still contemplated today, as people ponder the exact demarcation between youth and old age (Hollindale 210). Indeed, as Hollindale notes, these boundaries are "ever-changing" (210). Thus, the story's relevance and seeming "immortality" seems natural given the pertinence of its major theme, especially within a society that glorifies eternal youth with new beauty products and procedures being marketed every day for their "restorative" and "regenerative" powers.

Perhaps, then, the way in which *Peter Pan* is so smoothly adapted to reflect contemporary ideologies of adulthood, masculinity, sexuality, etc., says more about our culture's own inefficiency to evolve and adopt new ideologies than about the seeming "timelessness" of *Peter Pan*. As iterated in the analysis of P.J. Hogan's *Peter Pan*, similar anxieties concerning masculinity and femininity that were pertinent for Edwardian audiences still hold meaning for an audience that should have already moved on. Thus, the longer *Peter Pan* remains relevant, the

more we should begin to question the implications of its relevance, beyond the fact that it is an enchanting tale with enough adventure and romance to charm any audience.

This is not to say that we should not continue to enjoy the extraordinary magic that is Barrie's *Peter Pan*. His masterpiece gives us the rare opportunity to escape into a world where dogs are nurses, children can fly, fairies are oddly hostile creatures, and more importantly, where, as adults, we can experience the great treasure that is childhood. At the same time, however, it is time that scholars and critics come to recognize not simply how the novel and its successive adaptations reflect their contemporary ideologies, but the problematic nature of *Peter Pan*'s relevance throughout the century of its appropriation.

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