

How Did Peter Pan Grow Up Into A Children's Story?

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Introduction

On the morning of 1 May 1912, the bronze statue of a young boy blowing a pipe appeared in Kensington Gardens. The same day, the acclaimed writer James Matthew Barrie published the following announcement in the *Times*:

There is a surprise in store for the children who go to Kensington Gardens to feed the ducks in the Serpentine this morning. Down by the little bay on the south-western side of the tail of the Serpentine they will find a May-day gift by Mr. J. M. Barrie, a figure of Peter Pan blowing his pipe on the stump of a tree, with fairies and mice and squirrels all around. It is the work of Sir George Frampton, and the bronze figure of the boy who would never grow up is delightfully conceived. (Tatar xxiv)

The celebrated British sculptor Sir George Frampton had been commissioned by Barrie for the project of a statue to be situated exactly where the hero of Barrie's narrative world, the fictional character Peter Pan, lands in the story after leaving the nursery. The placement of the statue did not only testify Barrie's lifelong involvement in philanthropic activities, but also his charities in favour of children (Tatar xxxii, xxxiii).¹ The event was meant to celebrate his main literary achievement: the recent publication in 1911 of his children's novel *Peter and Wendy* – later renamed *Peter Pan* – based upon his incredibly successful play *Peter Pan* (1904), a work meant for the heterogeneous public consisting of both children and adults. Although the House of Commons questioned Barrie's right to advertise his work in a public space, and the aesthetic response of the critics to the statue was not always positive,

¹ Barrie's most important charitable initiative was his decision to give the copyright of all versions of *Peter Pan*, and then bequeath all the proceeds derived from the play *Peter Pan* and the novel *Peter and Wendy* to the London children's hospital on Great Ormond Street, better known as GOSH (Tatar xxxiii; Alton 30).

Frampton's Peter Pan soon became a main attraction for the many fans of Peter Pan visiting London.

Interestingly enough, Barrie was not happy with the outcome of his commission, which, according to him, did not "show the Devil in Peter" (Birkin 202). This statement may strike one as improper, considering that it refers to a character who has become an icon of children's fantasy world. What exactly did Barrie mean when he referred to Peter Pan as a "Devil"? Barrie's comment becomes clearer when we consider the genesis of Peter Pan. The path which led from the appearance of the adult play *Peter Pan* to the publication of the children's novel *Peter and Wendy* had been quite taxing for Barrie. Being convinced that his characters might flourish only on stage, Barrie was very reluctant to write a narrative with Peter as a protagonist in a text for children. In 1907 the *Bookman* reported: "Mr. Barrie has often been asked to write a short narrative or libretto of his immortal child's play and has often refused" (Tatar xviii–xix). More generally, Barrie's reluctance to situate his stories in a stable text is also evident in the numerous revisions that the play underwent before being published for the first time only in 1928 — 24 years after its première. From his point of view, Barrie was then right to complain about Frampton's "suppression of the Devil" in Peter Pan. In his Peter Pan figure, Frampton had represented an uncomplicated, conventional version of the children's fantasy, which was neither in tune with Barrie's awareness of his own work nor with his original depictions of children as "gay, innocent, and heartless" at the end of *Peter and Wendy*.

My research aims at exploring the significance of Barrie's constant reshaping of the Peter Pan materials in order to recast the story for a young audience. Moreover, I will investigate as to what extent the ambiguity and instability of the Peter Pan fictions have been tamed in its school and cinema adaptations. These adaptations have deployed strategies to counter Barrie's rebellious attitude against the didacticism and pedagogic expectations which

are conventionally associated with children's literature. As will become clear in the following, Barrie challenged the traditional barriers between adults and children on many points. Nevertheless, Peter Pan has been singled out to become a cultural icon of children's literature – hence, my central questions: How, exactly, did Peter Pan grow up into a children's story? What conflicting discourses and ideologies concerning childhood may be seen to inform Barrie's different versions of the Peter Pan story?

Before illustrating the methodology which I have chosen to carry out my analysis, I will briefly describe the nature of the literary corpus which constitutes the topic of my research. My research will deal with what I will refer to in the following as, alternatively, the Peter Pan fictions or the Peter Pan materials. These will be limited to the study of the "Ur-Peter Pan novel" marketed for adults, *The Little White Bird* (1902), and the children's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911). Additionally, I will analyse the dedication written for the first published version of the play *Peter Pan* in 1928, "To the Five", and Barrie's short text "Captain Hook at Eton" (1927). Therefore, I will not consider as the object of study the innumerable literary adaptations of the Peter Pan fictions by other writers, often authorized by Barrie himself in his own days. Furthermore, it is important to underline already at this early stage that the play *Peter Pan*, apart from its dedication "To the Five", will not be analysed by means of close readings, but only through general references to its significance in the overall context of the Peter Pan materials. There are at least two reasons for these decisions. First, Barrie's innumerable revisions of the play make it very difficult to focus on a specific version and make it the object of my inquiry.² The instability of the Peter Pan

² As far as the genesis of the play is concerned, Richard Locke claims: "The script of the play never stayed still. It began as three acts and after the first year was both cut and enlarged to five acts. There are more than twenty variant endings. And Barrie never stopped revising the text of the play and delayed publication of the official script until 1928" (108).

fictions, which constitutes the main interest of my research, does not concern textual variants among different versions of the same texts; this topic has already been explored in other scholarly works.³ In this thesis, only those variations will be mentioned which are relevant for my argument, and I will refrain from producing a philological comparative study of manuscripts. Second, it seems to me that the most interesting peculiarities of the stage version are so deeply intertwined with the theatrical conventions of the time – in particular, with the influence of the pantomime as a genre on Barrie’s work⁴ – that, in order to productively analyse the crucial aspects of the play, I would have had to include an analysis of what happened on stage with regard to its distinct representations.⁵ Since a thorough account of the play as an event would have been beyond the scope of this thesis, I have preferred limiting the focus of close readings in my research to Barrie’s prose fictions *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy*.

After these necessary preliminaries, I will hereafter describe the main plot of the two novels considered. Peter Pan makes his first literary appearance in 1902 in the adult novel *The Little White Bird*. The novel is the account of the relationship between a middle-aged narrator, a bachelor named Captain W., who takes pleasure in entertaining with his own stories, and a young neighbour boy, David, whom he has met in the Kensington Gardens.⁶ The title of the novel *The Little White Bird* refers to one of these stories narrated to David

3 See for an illuminating discussion of this topic, R. D. S. Jack, “The Manuscript of Peter Pan”.

4 Marjorie Garber has argued that Peter Pan exposes the underlying fable of a pantomime (176). The genre of pantomime is part of the British theatre tradition since the mid-eighteenth century. Indebted to the tradition of the *Commedia dell’Arte*, it exploits, usually with comic intentions, a set of stock characters and repetitive plots to create an affiliation with the public, which returns year after year to attend the same show. For an overarching discussion of this topic, see Kirsten Stirling, “Transforming the pantomime formula in J. M. Barrie’s Peter Pan”.

5 I will mention, for example, the importance of role allocations in the different stage versions. We know that Mr. Darling and Captain Hook were often played by the same actor. The two father figures were thus displayed on stage simultaneously as a villain and as a domestic tyrant and unreliable master of the household: a dramatic gesture which, according to Locke, calls forth an interpretation in the oedipal context (126).

6 The story is modelled after Barrie’s autobiographical experience. He first met the five sons of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies in Kensington Gardens (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 306).

about the origin of children as birds before they are born. Captain W., who has no children himself, has been the silent facilitator of the engagement and subsequent marriage of David's mother, the young nursery governess Mary, with an artist. Seeing the difficult financial conditions of the young couple, Captain W. concocts the story of the death of his invented son Timothy after the birth of David in order to donate the supposedly dead boy's clothes to David. In the course of time, Captain W.'s affection for David increases; however, inventing stories for him and sharing adventures with him downtown, he enters into competition with Mary's motherhood. The central section of the novel, Chapters thirteen to eighteen, represents a series of fantasy tales within the main plot, which have Peter Pan as the protagonist. While in the main plot we have a character-bound narrator in the figure of Captain W., the stories in the central section are recounted by a third-person narrator. These stories of Peter Pan were to be excerpted in 1906 for the publication of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, with illustrations by Arthur Rackham.⁷ Here, Peter Pan is presented as a half-bird and half-child creature, a "Betwixt-and-Between", which combines both human and animal characteristics (Kavey 76–77). The narrator recounts that when Peter was seven years old, he decided to fly to the island in Kensington Gardens, where all the birds live who will become boys and girls. This island stands for what later becomes Neverland in *Peter and Wendy*. Being half human, Peter constantly longs for the company of children, and at a certain point, he asks the fairies of the garden for permission to return to his mother, convinced that she would always have left the window of the nursery open for him during his absence. When he sees that his mother has barred him from the nursery and that he has been

⁷ Arthur Rackham (1867–1939) was one of the best known British illustrators for classic fiction and children's literature of the Edwardian era. He became famous for his illustrations for the 1900 edition of the Brothers Grimm's *The Fairy Tales*. Among Rackham's illustrated books are works by William Shakespeare, John Milton, Jonathan Swift, Charles Dickens, Edgar Allan Poe, and James Barrie, as well as the *Mother Goose* series (*Encyclopaedia Britannica.com*).

displaced by a new baby, he decides to return forever to Kensington Gardens. Peter becomes the guardian of Kensington Gardens. He rides through the gardens in search for lost children, and in case he finds them dead, he gives them a decent burial, digging tombs with his spade. In this central section of the novel, Barrie also introduces a proto-Wendy figure. Indeed, one of the tales recounts the story of Maimie Mannerling, a four-year-old girl who dares to remain in the gardens after the closing time to see the fairies. There she meets Peter Pan, who tries to convince her to stay in the gardens forever. But after Maimie hears about the story of his being barred from his mother's window, she is so frightened that she decides to rush back home to her family and never stay in the gardens after closing time again. The main plot resumes after the end of the story of Maimie, recounting how Captain W. is completing a book inspired by his relationship with David. *The Little White Bird* draws extensively upon Barrie's personal life.⁸ The relationship with David is indeed modelled after his friendship

8 J. M. Barrie (1860–1937) grew up in Kirriemuir, Scotland. When he was aged six, his older brother, David, died. The mother could never recover from the trauma. Since this tragic episode, Barrie felt compelled to console his mother by trying to replace David in her memory. To please his parents, he matriculated at Edinburgh University. In the early 1880s, however, Barrie chanced his luck and decided to go to London to make a career as a journalist and novelist. His first books and plays were immediately well received. Though professionally very successful, due to his extreme shyness, his relationships with women remained complicated. Nevertheless, in 1894, he married a young actress, Mary Ansell. Apparently, the marriage remained unconsummated. In the early years of his marriage, Barrie wrote *Margaret Ogilvy*, a biography of his mother, and *Sentimental Tommy*, a novel based upon his childhood. In 1900, he published a sequel to *Sentimental Tommy*, titled *Tommy and Griazel*. In the late 1890s, Barrie formed the habit of spending his free time walking in Kensington Gardens, where he took pleasure befriending young boys. It is there that he met George and Jack Llewelyn Davies for the first time. At a party on New Year's Eve in 1897, he made the acquaintance with a young fascinating couple, Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, who were the parents of George and Jack. During the creation of *Peter Pan*, the Llewelyn Davies would have three more sons: Peter, Michael, and Nico. In 1901, James Barrie and his wife spent their summer holidays in Sussex with the Llewelyn Davies. The adventures undertaken with the boys during this holiday would be immortalized in the pictures of the photo-storybook *The Boys Castaways of Black Lake Island*. In 1902, Barrie published the novel *The Little White Bird*, which was another hit. The same year, the adult play *The Admirable Crichton* appeared on stage. The following years would see Barrie's success being definitely sealed by the play *Peter Pan* and the children's novel *Peter and Wendy*. Meanwhile, Arthur Llewelyn Davies died of cancer in 1907. The shock was probably the cause of Sylvia's progressive illness. After Sylvia's death in 1910, Barrie, who had in the meantime divorced Mary, devoted most of his time and energy to take care of the five orphans. George and Peter were sent to Eton. Michael, the most fragile of the five boys, became more and more dependent on his protector. Although he also studied at Eton, he would always feel abandoned and in need of Barrie's psychological support. At the outbreak of WWI, George and Peter, who were studying at Cambridge, decided to sign up. George was killed in Flanders in 1914. In 1920, Barrie wrote *Mary Rose*, which is considered one of his best plays. The same year Michael, twenty-one and Barrie's "favourite", drowned in an accident at Oxford. His corpse was found together with that of his best friend Rupert Baxton. There were suspicions that the accident may have been a double suicide of the two. From that moment on, Barrie, devastated by this last loss, led a darkened existence living alone in London. Public recognition, however, did not wane. Barrie was appointed the Chancellor of Edinburgh University, and he was awarded the Order of Merit. His last play, *The Boy David*, a homage to his brother David whose premature death had inaugurated the tragic series of Barrie's private losses, appeared in 1936. Barrie

with the sons of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, whom he had met for the first time in 1897. Barrie was immediately fascinated by Sylvia Davies, though the real nature of their relationship remains mysterious. Paradoxical as it may seem, Barrie, a man with no children and with a presumably unconsummated marriage which ended in divorce, became incredibly attached to the family made up by Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and their sons. After the death of Arthur (1907) and Sylvia (1910), he took care of the five orphans by adopting them and financing their education (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 306). That he considered the five boys the main source of inspiration is demonstrated by the dedication “To the Five” that Barrie wrote for the play *Peter Pan* many years after the first stage production.

The second work which will be the object of my study is the children’s novel *Peter and Wendy*. The narrative is set in the Darling family’s household. Mrs. and Mr. Darling, a young couple with three children, are going to spend the evening out. Peter Pan profits from their absence to appear in the nursery, accompanied by a tiny fairy, Tinker Bell. An orphan craving for stories himself, Peter has been lurking around the nursery many times, attracted by the stories told to the Darling siblings: John, Michael, and Wendy. Seducing them with the promise to teach them to fly, he abducts the children. After a perilous journey, Peter and the three children land in Neverland, a magic land where all imaginations come true, but also a treacherous territory inhabited by fantastic creatures and by the pirates guided by Captain Hook, Peter’s antagonist. Hook seeks revenge upon Peter after having yielded to him during their last confrontation, when he lost his arm. On the other side, Peter can count on the support of the Lost Boys, a band of orphans to whom he represents the captain and hero. Wendy, despite the hostility of the jealous Tinker Bell, is very much loved by the Lost Boys, who find in her the mother they have never had. For her part, Wendy undertakes the role of a

died in London in 1937 (Wulschläger 118–141).

loving mother and acts as the devoted wife of Peter, thus staging a reconstitution of the family in Neverland. The novel is the account of a series of adventures set in the fantastic scenario of Neverland, which culminate in the final duel between Peter and Hook, when the latter is defeated and killed. After this episode, Wendy decides it is time to go back home. She tries to convince Peter to follow them, but Peter rejects the offer, claiming it will force him to abandon his state of never-ending childhood and to grow up. The novel ends with the Darling siblings returning home accompanied by the Lost Boys, and with Mr. and Mrs. Darling welcoming them back joyfully. Peter observes the epilogue from the window. He has retained his freedom, but like his predecessor in *The Little White Bird*, he will be forever barred from the joys of parental love.

Over the past thirty years, Peter Pan has been the object of profuse scholarly study in the expanding field of children's literature studies.⁹ In particular, the figure of Peter Pan has triggered a debate on the construction of childhood in children's literature. The seminal essay which has opened this debate is Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan. Or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). Using a psychoanalytical approach, Rose claims in her study that *Peter and Wendy* exposes the adults' expectations about children's literature, based on an ongoing mystification of the child as innocent. Children's literature, according to Rose, is not about children, but about adults' wishes of an imaginary, idealized childhood. Adult writers, indeed, shape and adapt their image of the child in order to see their own expectations concerning childhood fulfilled. In Rose's view, Peter Pan is the emblem of the

⁹ The two main threads of research on the Peter Pan fictions have been traditionally represented by the biographical and the psychoanalytical approaches. Considering the ambiguities of Barrie's life, the second has often been interpreted as an evolution of the first. In the last thirty years, however, queer and cultural studies have contributed to broaden the spectrum of interpretative approaches. One of the first and most insightful analyses is Marjorie Garber's study *Vested interest. Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. Recent scholarship concerns, among others, the exploration of Peter Pan's political aspects, such as the depiction of race and empire, and the study of the relationship of the Peter Pan materials with Victorian folklore and pirate lore. Textual analysis and genre theory have also provided fruitful threads of investigation (Holmes 134–139).

unsettling relationship between children and adults posited by children's literature (Holmes 135).

My starting point for the study of the Peter Pan fictions will be the psychoanalytical approach adopted by Jacqueline Rose in her study *The Case of Peter Pan. Or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. I will use psychoanalysis in order to implement Rose's argument, by means of close reading of a series of selected passages from Barrie's reiterations. My research does not just aim to underline how the texts resist linguistic and semantic closure, as Rose has already done. Investigating on how conflicting discourses are actually at stake in all three of Barrie's inherently unstable versions of the Peter Pan story, I will expand on Rose's argument in order to show the reasons why Barrie's *Peter Pan*, despite undermining the pleasurable representations of childhood, has proven to remain one of the most beloved figures of children's literature. What is the peculiarity of the conception of childhood's innocence in Barrie's works? Why, if it is no more than a fantasy produced by and for adults, has it never lost its grip on a heterogenous public over more than a hundred years?

As the polemic stance of Rose's text represents the starting point of my analysis, Chapter 1 of this study will engage with her work and with the assessment of its significance more than thirty years after its first publication in 1984. The special edition of the *The Children's Literary Association Quarterly* issued in 2010 dedicated to Rose's study of *Peter Pan* epitomizes the fact that despite the controversial nature of her claims, her study has represented an invaluable contribution to the advancement of the academic field of children's literature studies. This first chapter will also offer me an opportunity to elucidate Rose's psychoanalytical terminology in order to deploy it productively in my subsequent analysis of the Peter Pan fictions. More specifically, I will explain how Rose draws upon Lacan's theory

of the unconscious in order to underpin her claim regarding the impossibility of children's literature. According to Rose, our relation to childhood reproduces our relation to language and its role in the subject formation, as described by Lacan. The myth of the purity of childhood, Rose argues, has its roots in our lifelong search for stability in language. This claim is of paramount importance not only to assess Rose's theory about the impossibility of children's literature, but also to understand the objections raised against her argument and the debate around her study resumed in *The Children's Literary Association Quarterly*.

In Chapter 2, I will turn to the analysis of the fairy tale materials in *Peter Pan*. I will start my analysis by asking whether *Peter Pan* might be considered an Edwardian *Kunstmärchen*. My aim, however, will not be to explore the influence of famous fairy tales on Barrie's work. Grounding my research in the psychoanalytical theory, I will invoke Freud's essay, *The Uncanny*, and his anthropological essay, *Totem and Taboo*. Freud's description of the psychoanalytical significance of fairy tales, I will argue, can indeed be deployed to investigate crucial aspects of the Peter Pan fictions. In *The Uncanny*, Freud contends that the artificial setting of fairy tales neutralizes the uncanny effect. Notwithstanding this claim, I will show that Barrie's use of the fairy tale materials actively contributes to the disquieting effect of the Peter Pan fictions. I will use Freud's notion of the uncanny, together with his anthropological system as expressed in *Totem and Taboo*, to better assess the disquieting effect of the Peter Pan materials. Additionally, by means of an excursus on Charles Kingsley's fairy tale *The Water Babies*, I will also show that Barrie's use of fantasy distances itself significantly from the previous Victorian fairy tales. The latter exploited the concept of human evolution to transform fairy tales into a didactic tool. By contrast, Barrie insists on the disruptive force of children's imagination against any form of didacticism or moralistic pedagogy. Close readings in this part will focus on the analysis of that very unconventional fairy figure represented by Peter Pan's companion Tinker Bell.

In Chapter 3, I will analyse the Peter Pan fictions in the historical context of the growing consumer society of the Edwardian era. The new needs of the consumer society will be explained in terms of adult regression to a myth of endless playfulness in which childhood represents a lost Cockaigne. I will contend that the Edwardian fascination with gift books and toys allows adults to retrieve a dream of endless possibilities. At the same time, the awareness that this dream has to necessarily stop when growing up infuses nostalgic tones into this fascination. I will show that the Peter Pan fictions embody this desire. As Jackie Wulschläger perceptively observes: “Peter Pan is the dream figure of an age which declined to grow up” (111). The wish to bridge the divide between adulthood and childhood in the Edwardian time will be analysed under two aspects. On the one hand, if the adults are to be on par with children, they have to enjoy the same playfulness as children. The analysis of selected passages from *The Little White Bird* will be used to underpin this argument. On the other hand, being on par with children also means, in the Peter Pan fictions, acknowledging their invaluable role as a source of imagination in the authorial creative process. I will argue that the dedication “To the Five” to the play is a performative act that acknowledges the child agency in the creative process. Additionally, I will demonstrate that the dedication almost represents a demise of authorial preponderance. While in *The Little White Bird*, the narrator still reasserts his supremacy, in the dedication, Barrie almost effaces his authorial voice as a creator to the point of self-fashioning himself as forgetful of his work. The five boys ultimately overshadow the mastery of the author over his work.

In Chapter 4 of my research, I will resort to the Althusserian concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to explore the long-lasting success of the Peter Pan theme, based upon the interplay between innocence and experience, the clash between childhood and adulthood, and the celebration of the role of imagination in human experience. As a matter of

fact, as Althusser teaches, ideology interpellates individuals as free subjects before they submit to the imaginary representations evoked by the ISAs. By means of which narrative strategies did Peter Pan become a children's story despite its tensions and ambiguities? Why was *Peter and Wendy* singled out as a classic for children instead of other Victorian and Edwardian children's narratives, or of other successful works by Barrie? This chapter will show that through deploying different strategies, the ISAs have turned the Peter Pan story into a cultural icon, capable of captivating children and adults alike. In particular, I will underline the adults' concerns that lie beyond the use of the Peter Pan story in school editions and in film adaptations. In the first part of the chapter, I will consider the ISA of education. I will analyse the role played by Captain Hook in Barrie's anti-didactic stance. Together with Tinker Bell, Captain Hook seems indeed to represent the main disruptive force among the characters of the Peter Pan fictions (apart from their protagonist Peter). Although he stands out as a symbol of the British gentleman educated at Eton, I will show that the depiction of Captain Hook as the indefatigable villain who never neglects good manners clashes with the new educational agenda of the British government at the beginning of the century. Barrie's short text "Captain Hook at Eton" will be read against the backdrop of Rose's analysis of the bowdlerisation that the novel *Peter and Wendy* underwent in its school editions in order to explore the scope of the ISA of education. However, I will introduce a new element in Rose's analysis of the character, by relating the ambiguities in the depiction of Captain Hook to the new cultural construction of masculinity in the political scenario of British New Imperialism. Subsequently, in the second part of the chapter, I will turn to the ISA of the cultural apparatus with an analysis of the evolution of the figure of Peter Pan in the context of popular culture through some of its most successful film adaptations. After a brief discussion of the issues raised by the translation theorist Lawrence Venuti with regard to the analysis of film adaptations of literary texts, I will delve into *Peter Pan's* film versions, focusing on a

selection which will include Walt Disney's animated film version *Peter Pan* (1953) and Steven Spielberg's *Hook* (1991). On the one hand, I will investigate whether the tensions of the Peter Pan fictions have been simply suppressed or skilfully tamed in order to make them more attractive to the larger audience of film versions. On the other hand, I will show that the unstable, contradictory elements of the Peter Pan materials have made it possible for adapters in different eras to select those elements from Barrie's corpus of original texts which most suited the expectations of their contemporary public. The unstable and polymorphic nature of the original narratives has ultimately proved to be one of the main assets in the popularity of Peter Pan. This chapter will investigate to what extent the replications of the Peter Pan fictions in the afterlife of Peter Pan, here exemplified by its most representative film adaptations, continue to be expressions of the original tensions of Barrie's narratives. In other words, how efficiently have the ISAs worked within the Peter Pan fictions? Do the ISA of education and the ISA of cultural apparatus draw upon the same strategies?

A comparison with Frampton's statue of Peter Pan mentioned at the beginning of this introduction can illuminate the relevance of these questions as well as the intellectual curiosity which has driven my research. Martina Droth in her essay on Frampton's statue in Kensington Gardens has challenged the naïve reality that it seems to represent at first sight (215ff.). According to Droth, Frampton's Peter Pan is, compositionally, a disjointed, highly unstable piece of statuary art (see Appendix 1). While the figure of Peter is playing his pipe in a self-absorbed manner, as if he were walking in the air, the plinth upon which Peter steps forward, with its intricate mix of roots, animals, fairies, and other non-identifiable figures emerging from the clay, unsettles the compositional equilibrium of the work. Studies have demonstrated that, in fact, the plinth and the figure were realized by Frampton separately, and joined together later. Ideally, this study foregrounds the tension inherent to the Peter Pan

fictions in a similar way. While the instability foregrounded by the plinth resonates with the tensions brilliantly evoked by Rose in her study on the Peter Pan materials, this possibly threatening world seems to have been restrained in the crowning magical figure of Peter Pan, who still enchants the public today as an icon of popular culture. By means of a meditation on the Peter Pan fictions, the object of this study will be the analysis of the impossibilities and, at the same time, of the charm of the encounter between these two opposite forces in children's fiction.

1. The Instability of the Peter Pan Materials and Their Psychoanalytical Meaning

1.1 Introduction

In his two essays “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” (1953) and “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud” (1957), Lacan draws upon the theory of the linguistic sign by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) to show how language creates the unconscious. Indeed, according to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language: dreams, mistakes, and other psychoanalytical symptoms are a rhetorical articulation of the unconscious. Lacan accepts de Saussure’s distinction in the linguistic sign between the signifier and the signified. However, the arbitrariness of the relationship between the two is such in Lacan’s theory that the signifier no longer refers to an individual signified, but to a chain of signifiers (Muller 56).¹⁰ In particular, in Lacan’s theory, the pure quest for a pristine signified is doomed to failure, as the sign is no more a representation of a thing, but a structure that determines all the social codes and prohibitions of the civilization we live in (*Norton Anthology* 1160). The only object of attention for both the psychoanalyst and the linguist is the signifying chain (Bowie 128). To underline the elusive nature of the signified, Lacan grounds his notion in the letter’s signifying chain, as foregrounded in Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Purloined Letter” (1845).¹¹ Lacan uses Poe’s story to show that, in fact, the characters’ behaviour is not

10 “We can take things no further along this path than to demonstrate that no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification” (Lacan 141).

11 In this essay, Lacan examines Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Purloined Letter”. In Poe’s story, a woman of royalty, probably a queen, receives an incriminating letter, whose exact content will remain mysterious throughout the whole story. The letter is stolen from her boudoir by the queen’s minister – most certainly with the aim of blackmailing her – under the eyes of the queen self, who cannot protest though for fear of seeing the uncomfortable content of the letter revealed to the Court. The Prefect of the Police, after having failed to find the letter in the minister’s rooms, asks the perceptive amateur detective Dupin to help him. Dupin finds the letter, looking for it in the most obvious and visible places: He understands that the minister would have been astute enough to foresee that the police would search for a hidden place. Dupin writes a false letter to replace the original one. He conjures up an excuse to visit the apartment again and substitutes the stolen letter with his copy. The story shows that Dupin’s success relies upon his ability to analyse the personalities of the individuals involved, and most significantly, to reconstruct the

determined by the content of the letter (which remains undisclosed in Poe's text) or by their psychology, but by their displacement with regard to the letter's position. The letter in Poe's story is taken by Lacan to exemplify his notion of the pure signifier. Moreover, the displacement of the characters according to the letter's position shows that the individuals are constantly shaped by signs (in terms of social codes, conventions and so on) (*Norton Anthology* 1159–1160).¹²

The elusiveness of the signified allows Lacan to highlight the instability of subject positions in his theory of the unconscious.¹³ According to Lacan, the psychoanalytical process by means of which individuals acquire subjecthood is characterized by a high instability determined by their shifts between the Imaginary and the Symbolic order. The Imaginary is determined by the infantile experience of the "mirror phase". In this phase, which characterizes the human development between the ages of six and eighteen months, the individual can still think of himself as a coherent subject. Lacan, however, contends that the "mirror phase" extends into adult life and continues to define the adult's experience of the external world far beyond childhood. Individuals, indeed, are prone to imagine themselves throughout their life as coherent subjects to seek an imaginary state of wholeness. In order to compensate for the inevitable sense of incompleteness of human life, they try to pursue an ideal self-governing ego free from contradictions (Bowie 122). Therefore, the imaginary state

signifying chain.

12 At the beginning of the story, the queen leaves the letter in a visible place to foil her husband's suspicions. By doing so, she cannot avoid being robbed of the letter. The minister adopts the same strategy. He derails the police's investigation, but at the same time, repeats the queen's mistake and subsequently remains entrapped in his action.

13 According to Lacan, the formation of subjectivity articulates itself in three orders of the psyche: the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic orders. The Real is the most difficult to define in Lacan's theory, because it represents what cannot be talked about. Indeed, the Real vanishes as soon as it becomes the object of discussion. The Imaginary, by contrast, is the object of Lacan's essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" (1949). In this essay, the Imaginary corresponds to the moment when the infant recognizes its image in the mirror. The dimension of the Imaginary is important in that it allows the child to overcome its sense of fragility. Seeing its image reflected in the mirror, it feels reassured about the sense of autonomy and totality derived from the unitary image reflected by the mirror. The Symbolic order, finally, represents the dimension in which human beings begin to speak, thus having to accept that their self is necessarily structured by the system of signs (*Norton Anthology* 1159).

of wholeness is not just restricted to the “mirror phase”. On the contrary, it remains a constant in human lives, which is likely to re-emerge every time this sense of unity is invoked anew as a necessary barrier against the threats posed by the factors of absence and incompleteness. When the human subject acquires speech, he inserts himself into the Symbolic order governed by language. By doing so, the subject consents to putting his instinctual energies under the Symbolic. However, given the slippery nature of the signifier, the Symbolic order is the domain of the perpetual restructuring of the signifying chain (Bowie 132). Inhabiting the Symbolic order thus entails the acknowledgement on the part of the subject of the incompleteness of his nature. Therefore, the subject, according to Lacan, is never a repository of stability. The seductive yet deceptive promise of fulfilment constituted by the Imaginary can be disclosed only by recognizing the destiny of the subject as “one of indefinite displacement” (Bowie 151).

In the following chapter, I will discuss Rose’s argument against the possibility of children’s literature within this frame of reference. In her study on children’s literature *The Case of Peter Pan. Or the Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984), Rose has used the psychoanalytical methodology to show the inconsistencies of children’s fiction. Drawing upon Lacan’s theory, Rose asserts that children’s literature is an expression of the adult’s desire to retrieve through childhood the illusory promise of integrity and harmony of the Imaginary. Adult writers project on children their longing for stability, but they are themselves entrapped in the instability of the signifying chain. Since the subject cannot possibly master language – on the contrary, it is language which governs the unconscious, as shown above – children’s fiction is dominated by the constant slippage between child and adult subject positions, which ultimately lays bare the illusory nature of the existence of a barrier between children and adults posited by the narratives for young readers. The Peter Pan

fictions expose this mechanism with particular intensity, with their constant slippage from child expectations to adult desires.

Rose's scholarly work on children's literature has been assessed in 2010 through a special edition of the prestigious review dedicated to children's fiction, *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. In this special issue, Rose's essay has been reassessed by scholars who engaged with her argument. The main objection to Rose is that the instability and ambiguity she points out is not an exclusive characteristic of children's literature. On the other side, objections have been raised against Rose's conception of adult exploitation of the power imbalance between adulthood and childhood. These scholars underline that the narratives for children, in order to appeal to them, have to allow for a certain degree of interaction between an adult's narrative and its child addressees. Without these interactions, the manipulation Rose talks about would never be possible. In my overview of this debate, I will show that Rose's study has been ground-breaking in that it has laid bare, for the first time in this scholarly field, that the illusionary myth of unity and purity of language remains a chimera, particularly in children's literature, where adult authors writing for children seek to stage their narrative voice as a repository of stability.

1.2 Jacqueline Rose's Psychoanalytical Engagement with the Peter Pan Fictions

Jacqueline Rose's essay *The Case of Peter Pan. Or the Impossibility of Children's Literature* first appeared in 1984, at a time when the study of children's literature still lacked a fully-fledged theoretical frame. To support her account of the peculiarities of children's literature within the fictional world, Rose adopted the psychoanalytical methodology, which drew upon the work of Lacan.¹⁴ The main argument of her ground-breaking study was that

¹⁴ Rose has explained that the choice of her provocative title has been the follow-up of a conversation with Lacan, which took place in 1975. Upon hearing that she was preparing a PhD thesis on children's writing, Lacan reacted with the question: "Est-ce qu'il peut exister une littérature pour enfants?" (Rudd and Pavlik 227).

children's fiction is characterized by the particular constructedness of the conception of its child readers. Children's literature is determined by the idealized and utopian vision of the child as innocent and pure, which is imposed by adults and, consequently, by the adult writer (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 230–231). Adult writers, indeed, exploit the disparity in terms of power between the child and the adult in order to see their own expectations and needs about children fulfilled in the texts for young readers (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 161). Viewed under this aspect, the reworkings of the Peter Pan materials are an emblematic example, in Rose's view, of the troubled and fragmented process by which adults shape and adapt their image of the child, a process which usually remains concealed in simpler texts. As a "cultural myth, it [Peter Pan] undoes itself, or offers the tools of its undoing. [...] It shows innocence not as a property of childhood but as a portion of adult desire" (Rose xii). *Peter Pan* thus becomes the emblem of the culturally repressed in that, like no other children's book, it represents the impossibility for the adult to speak genuinely for and to the child (Rose xiii).

Focusing on this last impossibility, Rose asserts that language is *the* problem in children's literature (16).¹⁵ Grounding her argument in Lacan's essays "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" and the "Seminar on 'The Purloined letter'", she shows that our relation to childhood reproduces our relation to language (Rose 17). At least since the eighteenth century, children's literature reflects a constant demand for stability in language. This desire for stability achieved in language is connected with the myth of purity of childhood, which is grounded primarily in the thought of the philosophers

15 Rose's use of psychoanalysis differs from the strictly Freudian approach adopted by Michael Egan in his essay "The Neverland of Id: Barrie, Peter Pan, and Freud". Egan argues that Peter Pan story represents a symbolic metaphor for Freud's theory of the unconscious. He thus sees Neverland as a representation of the child's id, and the conflict with Captain Hook as the resolution of Peter's Oedipal complex (37). Most significantly, drawing upon Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of the Enchantment*, Egan seems to imply that the universe of the Peter Pan story helps children to satisfactorily resolve the traumas in their psyche. Despite using a psychoanalytic approach, Egan's conclusions are very different from those of Rose.

John Locke (1632–1704) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). For both the philosophers, the linguistic sign is imperfect and misleading (Rose 46) – the relation between the linguistic sign and the object it refers to is unnatural. If language is imperfect, however, an original and uncontaminated form of expression has to be retrieved through the child (Rose 47); the properly educated child, such is the hope especially of Rousseau, will be able to restore the unity of language and the objects of the world (Rose 47). Children’s literature, according to Rose, is based on the mystification of both the pureness of childhood and of the originary uncontaminated language.

However, in the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’”, Lacan debunks the subject’s assumption of mastery over language. It is the displacement of an incriminating letter which governs the subjects’ actions in Poe’s tale. The “Seminar” distinguishes in Poe’s narrative three subject positions: that of the “blind”, who sees nothing; that of “the complacent seer”, who is so self-absorbed that he pretends he can see without being seen; and that of “the robber”, who can assess the limitations of the other two positions and take advantage of this ability. As has been observed, there is a connection between these three positions and the psychoanalytic process by which the individual achieves its subjecthood. The position of the blind is correlated to the Lacanian Real; that of the self-absorbed seer to the realm of the Imaginary; that of the robber to the sphere of the Symbolic (Muller 63).

It is important to underline that these three positions, in Lacan’s psychoanalytical theory, are not related to the essence of the subjects: They are determined by the symbolic chain reaction that is put in motion by the letter’s displacement. What Rose wants to draw the attention to, underpinning her argument with Lacan’s work, is the fact that children’s literature rests on a paradox. Adults demand from children that they take up a stable position in language. However, even though they want them to recognize themselves in a coherent

speaking subject (Rose 141–143), the false image of unity conjured up in texts written for children is ultimately undermined by the constant slippage between child and adult positions (Waller 275). Adults writing for children would like to retrieve a lost world of pure meaning and language in texts, but they inevitably fail because the barrier between adults and children is constantly troubled by a disquieting fluidity, which finally entails the rupture of that barrier. Rose thus proposes that adults, when writing for children, are constantly dragged back into the imaginary, narcissistic subject position of self-absorption, of the one who is being seen without even realizing it. This happens because subject positions, as Lacan teaches, are mobile, and individuals, when moved by desire, are constantly under the threat of regressing to the order of the Imaginary.

Rose gives an illuminating example of this slippage in her analysis of the first lines of *Peter and Wendy*, in which she focuses on the shifts in the narratorial voice:

“All children, except one, grow up” -- these are the first lines in the 1911 story. Who is speaking and what is their place in the story? [...] This is therefore a narrator who can only read the thoughts of his characters because of an acknowledged relationship to them. The passage charts that relationship – it discovers, maps, and predicts it. But it is not the relationship of a character in the story who knows because he participates (Wendy or her mother), nor that of the omniscient narrator who knows precisely because he participates (the all-knowing from above). It is the relationship of a narrator who himself belongs on the edge of what he offers us as a *trauma* of growth – given three times over in the passage in a crescendo of insistence and anxiety: ‘grow up’, ‘will grow up’, ‘must grow up’. By the end of the passage, there is no clear distinction between the

narrator and the child he describes: 'You always know after you are two'. The child is an adult because he has reached the point of no return ('Two is the beginning of the end'): the adult is a child because of its total identification with the child at the moment (the shift from simple past tense to a continuous present and the 'you' which replaces the 'they'). (Rose 67)

The tormented history of Barrie's reworkings is unique in that the narrating adult constantly merges with the child he is speaking to (Rose 68): The barrier between the child and the adult is persistently debunked (Rose 70). Consider, for instance, Mr. Darling, who is remarkably prone to childish behaviour:

Wendy gave the words, one, two, three, and Michael took his medicine, but Mr. Darling slipped his behind his back.

There was a yell of rage from Michael, and "O father!" Wendy exclaimed.

"What do you mean by 'O father'?" Mr. Darling demanded. "Stop that row, Michael. I meant to take mine, but I – I missed it." (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 19)

Conversely, the children play at being adults, as in the following passage:

Then Mrs. Darling had come in, wearing her white evening-gown. She had dressed early because Wendy so loved to see her in her evening-gown, with the necklace George had given her. She was wearing Wendy's bracelet on her arm; she had asked for the loan of it. Wendy so loved to lend her bracelet to her mother.

She had found her two older children playing at being herself and father on the occasion of Wendy's birth, and John was saying:

“I am happy to inform you, Mrs. Darling, that you are now a mother,” in just such a tone as Mr. Darling himself may have used on the real occasion.

(Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 16)

In other passages, as in the following, the narrator is unmasked as the co-author of the story together with the children, to the point that, as Rose correctly points out, the account of the Peter Pan materials becomes a metaliterary reflection on the act of speech (22):

The extraordinary upshot of this adventure was – but we have not decided yet that this is the adventure we are to narrate – perhaps a better one would be the night attack by the redskins on the house under the ground, when several of them stuck in the hollow trees and had to be pulled out like corks. Or we might tell how Peter saved Tiger Lily’s life in the Mermaids’ Lagoon, and so made her his ally.

Or we could tell of that cake the pirates cooked so that the boys might eat it and perish; and how they placed it in one cunning spot after another; but always Wendy snatched it from the hands of the children, so that in time it lost its succulence, and became as hard as stone, and was used as a missile, and Hook fell over it in the dark. [...]

Which of these adventures shall we choose? The best way will be to toss for it.

I have tossed, and the lagoon has won. This almost makes one wish that the gulch or the cake or Tink’s leaf had won. Of course I could do it again, and make it best out of three; however, perhaps fairest to stick to the lagoon.

(Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 72)

Rose's analysis of the narrator's voice is in line with Barbara Wall's account of the problematic nature of Barrie's use of double address. Wall's taxonomy for the ways narrators in the fiction for children address their audience (Cadden 227)¹⁶ has its premise in her disagreement with the conceptions of children's literature as that of Nodelman, which she considers very reductive. A definition of children's literature, according to Wall, cannot be based on the recurrence of certain themes, patterns, or the presence of child characters. The real marker of fiction for children, she asserts, is the relationship of the narrator–narratee (Wall 234). According to Wall, the narrator is “the voice we ‘hear’ as we ‘listen’ to the story being told” (4). Wall argues that the prevailing modes of address in contemporary fiction for children are respectively the “single address” and the “dual address”. Fiction for children has a single address when the narrator adopts the point of view of children, thus relinquishing self-consciousness and the condescending tones (Wall 30). The narrative is in this case dominated by children's interests (Wall 35). By contrast, the dual narrative, which has its precursor in Lewis Carroll's *Alice Books*, address and appeals to adults and children simultaneously, but it is very difficult to maintain. Single and dual address represent an evolution of a third, earlier form of address developed by writers in the Victorian and subsequently in the Edwardian age, which Wall defines as “double address”: A narrative technique through which the narrator “winks” at an adult readership (Cadden 227). The Peter Pan materials, according to Wall, pertain to this category.

Although Wall believes in the possibility of children's literature, as is shown by her exploration of the devices of single and dual address, when she comes to the Peter Pan

¹⁶ Wall clearly states in her introduction to her study that she deals with literature expressly written to children. Works such as *Gulliver's Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Catcher in the Rye*, Wall argues, have been canonized as part of children's literature simply because young readers are often persuaded to read them. Nevertheless, they are not written to children, and as such they are excluded from the subject of her analysis (Wall 1–2).

stories, her conclusions are close to those of Rose.¹⁷ Barrie's narrator is "untrustworthy", constantly and unpredictably shifting between the child and adult narratees (Wall 25). The sphere of intimacy and sentimentality he creates with its child audience is often debunked all of a sudden by cynical remarks (Wall 26), showing almost resentment towards his young addressees (26–28). The literary outcome proves unsatisfactory. Yet, Wall acknowledges that some of the most intriguing episodes in the Peter Pan materials derive their strength from the tension between fantasy and crude, realistic passages. Paradoxically, she asserts that *Peter Pan* still charms its audience precisely because Barrie was never able to fix his writing in a consistent story (24).

1.2.1 Rereading Rose: The 2010 themed issue of *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly*

Despite the commonalities shown above between Rose and Wall, the latter, like many other critics, does not share Rose's negative view of children's literature. Nevertheless, Rose's ground-breaking study is still very much quoted in children's literature criticism, and there is hardly any critical study in this literary field which can eschew the issues which she raised for the first time. But the controversial nature of her study has not decreased in the course of time. The 2010 themed issue of *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly* testifies to the long-lasting interest in Rose's work. In this special issue, five distinguished academics situate her essay in the academic context of the mid 80's and subsequently try to reassess it from the point of view of contemporary criticism. What is questioned in particular in some of the contributions is the peculiarity of the Peter Pan materials within the children's fiction assumed by Rose, and by extension, that of children's texts within the fictional world.

¹⁷ "Barrie is Peter Pan, despite the fact that he could not write it. Peter Pan is a classic for children despite the fact that they could not read it – either because it was too expensive, or because it was virtually impossible to read" (Rose 6).

Criticism of Rose crops up in the essays with regard to her assumption concerning the particular power imbalance between the writer and the reader in children's literature. This imbalance, according to David Rudd and Anthony Pavlik, characterizes every speech and communication act (224), and not only children's literature. Language instability is not a peculiarity of *Peter Pan* but of every literary act and possibly of every speech act (Rudd and Pavlik 224).¹⁸

A reappraisal of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia has proved a further fruitful argument against children's literature's specificity, as postulated by Rose.¹⁹ Rudd, for example, convincingly argues that the inherently dialogic nature of novels leaves the readers free to come up with their own answers and position themselves among the conflicting discourses elicited by the narrative (302). The dialogic nature of novels always debunks the attempts at constructing a monological narrative. In children's literature, discourses interpellating adult desires may compete with those hailing the child. Nonetheless, according to Rudd, just as an adult reader, the child too will respond to these competing discourses interactively (Rudd 294).²⁰ In the reading process, as envisaged by Bakhtin's conception of dialogism, there are no adult authors manipulating passive child readers, in Rudd's view. When taking their place in the Symbolic order as human beings using language, children and adults are alike subject to the mystifications of the Symbolic orders (Rudd 294–299).

¹⁸ Rudd and Pavlik draw upon Peter Hunt when he points out that this imbalance is not "necessarily malign" (Rudd and Pavlik 224).

¹⁹ The theorist of literature Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) introduced the term heteroglossia to describe the polyphony of voices and languages which characterise the novel as a genre. In opposition to the "monologic" view of language proposed by traditional literary theory, which posits a unitary system of language controlled by its author, Bakhtin sees the forces at stake in language as centrifugal. He argues that in the novel, in particular, language works dialogically, exposing that interplay among multiple voices, conflicting discourses and social practices, which is defined by Bakhtin as heteroglossia (Norton Anthology 1073–1074).

²⁰ Both Nodelman and the Bakhtinian approach adopted by Rudd seem to take for granted that the narratorial voice may be that of an adult or a child, whereas for Rose, it is possible to be both, as her analysis of the *Peter Pan* story shows (Rose 69).

Perry Nodelman's contribution in this special issue of *The Children's Literature Association Quarterly* is of particular interest, as his methodological approach to children's literature has been traditionally distant from Rose's psychoanalytical frame. Trained as a "New Critic", Nodelman has convincingly applied the genre theory to the study of children's literature in his comprehensive study *The Hidden Adult*. In this work, Nodelman has insisted on the ambiguity of children's texts (*Hidden Adult* 185). On the one hand, adult writers want to protect children from knowledge in order to let them remain childlike; on the other hand, deploying a didactic tone, they provide children with the expertise they suppose young readers need in order to become adults (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 181). This duplicity is obtained through a shadow text,²¹ which constantly alludes to the more complex, and yet not overtly spoken, materials of the narrative (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 8). Even if the shadow text remains "unspoken beyond the simple surface, it provides that simple surface with its comprehensibility" (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 233). Indeed, according to Nodelman, didacticism can work satisfactorily only as long as it is disguised in pleasurable stories capable of appealing to young readers (*Hidden Adult* 36). The latter have to have at least a partial access to the complex knowledge of the shadow text to understand what is required from them (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 185). Nodelman does not deny the power imbalance between the reader and the writer in children's literature, as postulated by Rose. Contrary to Rose, however, Nodelman seems to hold on to the view that adults may consistently retain the position of the "robber" envisaged in the "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" – the position which represents the ability of being able to see from the outside. Moreover, he

21 Nodelman defines as "shadow text" the more complex virtual text underlying the actual text in children's literature. The shadow text implies more subtle complexities that are accessible only through previous knowledge (*Hidden Adult* 77). This shadow text is obtained by means of a juxtaposition of child and adult focalization. Providing a less innocent perspective, the shadow text invites young readers to go beyond the simplicity of the actual text without forcing them to abandon their innocent focalization (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 196–197).

believes that the texts for children inevitably have to make the complexity of the adult materials available to the young readers, at least to a certain extent (Nodelman, "Editor's Comments" 234). Without accessing this non-childlike knowledge, children would never be able to appreciate the narratives written for them.

Notwithstanding his stance on *The Hidden Adult*, looking at his response essay in the themed issue of *The Children's Literature Association*, it is possible to observe that Nodelman frames his ideas as a follow-up to Rose's work. Nodelman's starting point in this essay is in fact the acknowledgement of the invaluable contribution of Rose's study to the advancement of children's literature criticism and to the broadening of his own scholarly work. As he correctly points out, Rose's focus lies in the conditions of existence and production of children's literature (Nodelman, "Editor's Comments" 236). Applying the teachings of Lacan and Derrida to the texts written for children, Rose has explored the implications of psychoanalysis and deconstructionism when applied to children's literature (Nodelman, "Editor's Comments" 237). Then, with a move that very much resembles Rose's vocabulary, Nodelman contends that in choosing this approach, Rose overlooks the possibility that the text itself may be able to re-enact these conditions (Nodelman, "Editor's Comments" 237). According to Nodelman, children's books in fact "retain and express" the unconscious forces that Rose sees at the base of their production (Nodelman, "Editor's Comments" 233). The text, in other words, does not hide itself. On the contrary, it plainly exposes its originary contradictions, thus allowing for an encounter between the reader and the writer, despite the knowledge gap and power imbalance.

Beatrice Turner's essay in the same issue echoes Nodelman's position in her analysis of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Turner contends that the *Alice Books* show how children's texts do not necessarily conceal their troubling acts of repression (244). Quite the

contrary, according to Turner: Children's texts deliberately draw the attention of the reader to the power imbalance between the adult and the child (248). Furthermore, children's texts expose to what extent the desired characteristics of innocence and lack of knowledge projected by adult writers on children are constructions created by the "arbiters of language", namely adults. According to Turner, children's texts do not necessarily manipulate children. The opposite is true: Works of children's literature, such as the *Alice Books*, unmask the genre as an impossibility by depicting it as a mere projection of adults' desires.

I believe, however, that both Nodelman and Turner miss a very elementary point in Rose's argument. What Rose implies goes beyond the mere statement that children's texts are informed by adult conceptions of the nature of childhood. The most striking point in Rose's view is that the stability in language that adults demand from children, deemed indispensable if the child is to grow up into a coherent subject, is ultimately not attained by adults either. Rose debunks the possibility of an "arbiter of language" able to articulate "the child" as a whole. As a consequence, even the objection to Rose that children's literary texts – much like other literary texts – are never simple (Nodelman, "Editor's Comments" 232), is groundless, since Rose herself argues that *Peter Pan's* instability undermines precisely the adult illusion of being able to speak to the child.

1.3 Conclusion

In this section, I have given an outline of the significance of what Rose has defined as the "dispersion" of the Peter Pan story (Rose 6). Rose – and those critics who have engaged with her study – has used this notion to highlight the distorted conditions of the production of literary texts written for children. Although the criticism spurred by Rose's argument raises valid questions concerning the ideologies of childhood, which underpin the narratives for children, in my view, this debate overlooks the cultural premises of such ideologies. In

particular, it fails to grasp the specificity of the Peter Pan fictions in the cultural context of Victorian and Edwardian fancy.

In my analysis of the Peter Pan materials in the following chapter, I will draw upon Freud's notion of the uncanny and his conception of a parallel development of ontogenesis and phylogenesis in *Totem und Taboo* as the theoretical frame for the study of the fairy tale materials in the story of *Peter Pan*. Freud's argument is that fairy tales do not elicit uncanny sensations, because the uncanny is dampened by their artificial setting (*Norton Anthology* 839). The conventions of the genre resist the reality test. However, in my analysis, I will show that the Peter Pan fictions are in fact disquieting in that they undermine the didactic and moral lessons of Victorian fairy tales. This is most evident in the comparison with those Victorian fairy tales which refer to the new scheme of evolution resulting from the recent scientific discoveries by Charles Darwin. While the fairy tale elements in Victorian children's literature try to combine Darwin's theory of evolution with a divine plan to restore progressivist beliefs (Straley 10), I will contend that in Barrie's narratives, the progressive evolution from child to adult is put under strain. The Peter Pan texts, in fact, overturn the moral and didactic content of the fairy tale tradition. The child's mind is depicted as chaotic, and the children are stigmatized as heartless; Neverland looks more like the Hobbesian state of nature, than like the idealized one envisaged by Rousseau. Peter Pan's anarchism may represent an attack against the Victorian values, but its outcome is not joyful at all, contrary to what Nodelman contends (*Hidden Adult* 274). By highlighting these dire consequences, *Peter Pan* not only questions the myth of the blissful, innocent child; it also undermines the possibility of adult spiritual redemption through the child to which the myth of child innocence had traditionally paid lip service.

2. Peter Pan: An Edwardian *Kunstmärchen*?

2.1 Introduction

The origin of the *Kunstmärchen* as a genre dates back to the Late Middle Ages. It is not until 1846, however, that the literary term “*Kunstmärchen*” makes its first appearance in a review of the first collection of fairy tales published by the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen (Schmitz-Emans 301). In the twentieth century, the literary concept of the *Kunstmärchen* establishes itself in opposition to the tradition of the anonymously passed down *Volksmärchen*. While *Volksmärchen* have their roots in orally transmitted folktales whose original authors are unknown, *Kunstmärchen* are authored literary works by a usually renowned writer.²² They comprise a wide range of texts which belong to distinct national traditions. These include the above-mentioned fairy tales by Andersen, but also works which belong to the canon of German Romanticism, such as, among others, the tales of Adalbert von Chamisso, Ludwig Tieck, and Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué; and Victorian fairy tales such as Oscar Wilde’s “The Happy Prince”.

The literary influence of specific *Kunstmärchen* on Barrie’s *Peter Pan* has long been acknowledged by literary critics such as Anne Hiebert Alton and Maria Tatar, who, in their critical editions of *Peter Pan*, refer to Andersen’s fairy tales and Chamisso’s *Peter Schlemil’s Remarkable Story* (1814) as the main sources for Barrie. My analysis, however, does not aim

²² The distinction between *Volks-* and *Kunstmärchen*, however, has rightly been questioned by contemporary criticism. Seth Lerer argues that all fairy tales are the mid-nineteenth century literary residue of the joint work of authors, collectors and editors, started in the late seventeenth century (210). Even the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the collection of German folk stories by the Brothers Grimm which first appeared in 1812, was published only after the tales had been reshaped in order to meet the expectations of their middle-class audience (Lerer 213). The way the stylization of the folk material carried out by the Brothers Grimm has effaced the original “rusticity” (Lerer 213) is a clear example of the impossibility of maintaining a clear division between *Volks-* and *Kunstmärchen*. Dieter Petzold also shares Lerer’s criticism regarding the opposition between *Volks-* and *Kunstmärchen*. The commonalities between the two subgenres must not be undervalued, according to Petzold, despite significant differences like, for example, the situatedness in time and space for the *Kunstmärchen*, against the timelessness of the *Volksmärchen* (10 ff).

to pursue this strand of research. Instead of looking for recurrent motives in *Peter Pan* which bear resemblance to other famous nineteenth century's *Kunstmärchen*, I will explore the significance of the fairy tale materials in the Peter Pan fictions using Freud's essays *The Uncanny* (1919) and *Totem and Taboo* (1912–1913) as the frame of reference. I will focus on Freud's notion of the contiguity between ontogenetic and phylogenetic psychic development to explore how Barrie's *Peter Pan* seems to echo the unsettling implications for the assessment of cultural and societal development foregrounded by Freud's theory.

The overlapping between ontogenesis and phylogenesis²³ had first been suggested in the nineteenth century by the evolution theory,²⁴ and particularly by what is now considered one of its corollaries, namely the recapitulation theory. Those Victorian *Kunstmärchen* which acknowledged the potentially disquieting effects of these theories, like Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863), subsequently tried to tame them by turning the genre of the fairy tale into a didactic, evolutionary tale. By contrast, the Peter Pan fictions, when analysed from the point of view of Freud's inquiry into the cultural consequences of the parallelism between ontogenesis and phylogenesis, seem to reject such didacticism.

2.2 Ontogenesis and Phylogenesis of the Uncanny in Freud's Analysis

Given the complex and controversial nature of Freud's essay *The Uncanny*,²⁵ a few

23 Ontogenesis and phylogenesis are terms derived from the language of science. In biology, they refer to, respectively, the development of the single organism of a species from its conception to maturity (ontogenesis) and to the evolution of an entire species considered as a whole (phylogenesis).

24 The theory of recapitulation postulates that the evolution of the single organism of a species reproduces the various stages of evolutionary development of the species it belongs to. According to the recapitulation theory, ontogenesis thus reproduces phylogenesis.

25 Detlef Klemmer has in fact problematized the application of Freud's essay to the analysis of literary texts. Far from dismissing the invaluable contribution of psychoanalysis to literary criticism, Klemmer underlines the limits of a reductive Freudian reading when psychoanalysis is used as a means to decipher all the blind spots of a literary text by translating them into psychoanalytical processes. Especially with regard to modern and contemporary literary texts characterized by self-referentiality and meta-literary references, Klemmer argues that Friedrich Schlegel's notion of "Unverständlichkeit" of the literary text, which according to him marks what Roland Barthes much later would define as the "readerly text", proves more productive than psychoanalytical approaches. The "writerly" psychoanalytical reading, according to Klemmer, risks obscuring the richness of the literary text: "Und dann erscheinen in der Nacht der

general remarks on the relationship between fairy tales and the notion of uncanny are required before engaging with Freud's theory. Tzvetan Todorov gives a broad definition of fairy tales in his structural analysis of fantasy literature. In his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* fantasy literature is divided into two main categories: the "étrange" and the "merveilleux".²⁶ In the domain of the "étrange", supernatural events, in the end, find their own ratio in the story self. The laws of nature remain intact (Todorov 46). By contrast, in the category of the "merveilleux", events can be explained only with reference to a new order of things which has to be accepted without interrogating it. Fairy tales, according to Todorov, belong to the category of "pure merveilleux", where neither the characters nor the implied reader are moved by the supernatural elements represented (59). Subsequently, he briefly considers Freud's theory about the origin of the uncanny in the apparition of images linked to infantile experiences or the development of the human race. Despite admitting that the two concepts do not overlap, Todorov seems to take for granted that Freud's notion of the "unheimlich" translates his own notion of "étrange".

Freud, as Todorov correctly observes, distinguishes two classes of the uncanny: the one which proceeds from repressed infantile complexes and the one derived from surpassed modes of belief (*Norton Anthology* 838). However, Freud problematizes his notion of the uncanny when he deals with the transposition of the uncanny into fiction: "Fiction presents more opportunities for creating the uncanny sensations that are possible in life" (*Norton Anthology* 840). The uncanny derived from repressed infantile complexes draws upon psychic thoughts. This type of uncanny experience, in Freud's opinion, is as effective in

psychoanalytischen Textlektüre alle Katzen in einem oedipalen Grau." (71).

²⁶ Todorov refers, in fact, to four categories: « étrange pur », « fantastique-étrange », « fantastique-merveilleux », « merveilleux pur ». Strictly speaking, fantasy literature positions itself in between the *fantastique-étrange* and the *fantastique-merveilleux* (Todorov 49).

fiction as in reality, because its functioning and effectiveness do not depend on the relation with material reality. Psychological reality, in this case, overrules the material reality. By contrast, when drawing upon the repressed derived from the surpassed mode of thoughts, writers can either neutralize the uncanny by choosing an artificial setting, as it happens in fairy tales, or they can highlight it by using as fictional backdrop the world of common reality (*Norton Anthology* 839–840). Freud thus stresses the “uncanniness” of fairy tales, reaching conclusions which will be echoed by Todorov, when he claims that fairy tales pertain to the “merveilleux” and not to the “étrange”.

Freud considered the notion of the uncanny, outlined in 1906 by his contemporary Ernst Jentsch (1867–1919) in the essay “Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen”, unsatisfactory. As Detlef Kremer correctly points out, he found the equivalence between “unheimlich” and “nicht vertraut” suggested by Jentsch inaccurate (60). According to Freud, as shown by his exhaustive etymological excursus in the first part of *The Uncanny*, the uncanny does not simply arise in the confrontation with what is not familiar, but with what is *no more* familiar: “the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed” (*Norton Anthology* 837). As Kremer contends: “Indem er (Freud) aber stillschweigend das Praefix ‘un-’ durch ‘nicht mehr’ ersetzt, bereitet er den entscheidenden rhetorischen Schachzug vor, um das Unheimliche an die Verdrängungskonzeption anzukoppeln” (62). This move allows Freud to explain why, even in fiction, the type of uncanny proceeding from surmounted beliefs can retain its uncanniness. If the writer in the fictional world enacts a slippage from the world of common reality to old superstitiousness, then the return of the repressed also affects the surpassed beliefs. Nevertheless, when arguing that “primitive beliefs are most intimately connected with infantile complexes, and are, in fact, based upon them” (*Norton Anthology* 839), Freud lays his conception of the remoteness of fairy tales from the uncanny

open to criticism. Indeed, if there is a connection between uncanny images of infantile experiences and surmounted beliefs, then it is difficult to sustain that fairy tales are uncanny simply by virtue of their artificial setting (or “pure merveilleux” setting, as Todorov would put it).

As has been acknowledged, Freud’s exposition in *Totem and Taboo* aims at debunking the divide between what is considered to be a socially and psychologically normal behaviour, and the neurotic one, proposing instead a common ground of study for both neurosis and cultural phenomena (Paul 267–269). Human views of the world evolve along a path – starting from animistic thinking, they then proceed through religion, and end with the scientific view of the universe (Freud 102–103). According to Freud, there are parallels between these phases of the human view of the universe and the development of the individual libido (105). In animism, the earlier stage of development of the human race, men think themselves to be omnipotent. This phase corresponds to the narcissistic stage of individual development. In the second stage, men ascribe omnipotence to gods and yet retain the illusion of being able to influence the gods with faith. This stage corresponds to the individual development of attachment to one’s parents. In the last stage, a scientific view of the universe affirms itself: men acknowledge their impotence regarding the laws of nature, including death. This third stage corresponds to the individual development to maturity, when individuals give up the pleasure principle in order to adapt to reality. Most significantly, Freud underlines that neurotics reproduce the primitive beliefs in divine omnipotence typical of the animistic stage when they are taken in by their mental reality (103). He argues that this belief in the omnipotence of thoughts characterizes both the mental state of children and primitive men: Therefore, there is a parallel between ontogenesis and phylogenesis. According to Freud,

non-Western people correspond to the “childhood of race”,²⁷ and their habits can be better understood by comparing them with the fantasies, conflicts, and neuroses experienced by individuals during their childhood (Paul 271). Furthermore, according to Freud’s anthropology, the history of civilisation can be analysed in the same terms as that of an individual human lifetime (Paul 271). The evidence in this regard is provided by the close relationship between the symbolism of the unconscious encountered in dreams and neurotic symptoms, on the one hand, and the language of the public cultural discourse, on the other (Paul 268). Individual memory, which is anchored in infantile experiences, is limited to one’s lifespan; however, the continuity of civilization relies on the fact that individual memory is nourished by phylogenetic memory, which is transmitted from one generation to the other. Moreover, civilization is steeped in cultural symbolism comprising memories and fantasies that are transmitted phylogenetically (Paul 283). As Robert Paul observes: “Whether the ‘events’ symbolized in the Eucharist, for example, actually once occurred or not is a moot point; what is relevant is that each generation is capable of acting as if it understood the meaning of the ritual and was under the peremptory sway of the impulses and fears it enacts” (283). When Freud introduces his tripartite model of the psyche in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), the implications of his anthropological theory for psychoanalysis become clearer (Paul 279). The personal memory of the ego is deemed to be the outcome of the constant negotiations that take place between the phylogenetic promptings of our species, which have been internalized by the id, and the culturally inherited symbolic forms, the “customs, ceremonies, and dogmas” in which the particular cultural practices embodied by the superego – the prohibiting authority that secures the interests of a cultural program – are embedded (Paul 284–285). These two instances at the level of the personal memory of the ego are often

²⁷ Freud relies on an assumption shared by several theorists of the time, including the anthropologist James Frazer, according to which cultural history has to be understood as a series of progressive stages of civilization (Paul 271).

conflicting, as the regression of neurotics shows.

In my analysis, I will explore how radically the Peter Pan fictions foreground the interplay between the phylogenetic promptings and the culturally inherited program envisaged by Freud's anthropological thinking (Paul 284). I will first use Charles Kingsley's Victorian *Kunstmärchen* as a case study in order to show how Darwin's evolutionary theory had been exploited by Victorian didacticism to reaffirm the instances of the cultural program. Subsequently, I will revert to the Peter Pan materials and to the children's novel *Peter and Wendy* in particular, to show to what extent these fictions are informed by a constant, unresolved tension between the imperatives of the phylogenetic memory, incarnated by the unsettling and confused mind of the child, and the instances of the cultural program to which adults are expected to subject.

2.2.1 The Acknowledgment of Darwin's Theories in Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*

In their account of how fantasy progressively entered the domain of children's literature, Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn describe the peculiarity of the development of fantasy in the literature for young readers in Britain. The two scholars argue that the use of the fantastic in children's literature has long been ostracized by the British cultural system. Similarly, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas observes that in Britain, the narratives for children with a stronger emphasis on reason and a more explicit moral content were preferred to fairy tales, the latter being deemed unsuitable for young readers (Talairach-Vielmas 24). The first volume of fairy tales specifically advertised for children appeared in Britain only in 1804, with the publication of Benjamin Tabart's *Collection of Popular Stories for the Nursery* (Levy and Mendlesohn 23). But the editors of this collection continued to believe that fantasy could be granted a place in children's literature only if it was meant to deliver a moral lesson. As a consequence, fairy tale materials underwent a constant revision at the hands of editors

such as Thomas Bowdler (1754–1825) and Sarah Trimmer (1741–1810), who wanted to stress the moral content of the tales (Levy and Mendlesohn 23).

Under this aspect, the explosion of the fantastic, which characterizes the Victorian and Edwardian fancy, may strike us as unexpected. A close examination, in fact, shows that the reasons for the development of Victorian fantasy were not much different from those at the basis of the flourishing of fairy tales and folklore in Germany, with the collections of the Brothers Grimm. Trained primarily as scholars of folklore and philology, the Grimms' work on German folklore aimed primarily at providing a still politically fragmented Germany with a common cultural ground of folklore to advance the German civilization (Levy and Mendlesohn 20). According to Levy and Mendlesohn, something very similar must have happened in nineteenth-century Britain. At a time of a nation's increasing self-consciousness, fairy tale collectors even in Britain felt the need to investigate and exploit the value of the fairy tale to convey a sense of national authenticity: "didactic folklore served both to inspire nationalism and to direct it" (Levy and Mendlesohn 30). As Levy and Mendlesohn perceptively point out, this new conception of the fairy tale was strictly connected with the ideology of the child. With their rehabilitation of the fairy tale as expression of the "childhood of the race", authors like George MacDonald (1824–1905) and Charles Kingsley (1819–75) aimed at affirming the renovated youth of their own culture (Levy and Mendlesohn 37). In the course of the century, the status of fairy tales thus changes considerably in Britain: from anonymous tales published in chap books to vehicles of moral guidance, propelled by the work of authors such as MacDonald and Kingsley (Levy and Mendlesohn 31). Most interestingly, children become more and more the addressed audience of fairy tales.²⁸ This does not happen as a consequence of a more permissive notion of

²⁸ Levy and Mendlesohn actually point out that these narratives are often about a child, but written for adults. As a matter of fact, to fulfil their purpose, they also have to address and appeal to those in charge of the education of

children's education, but because fairy tales and moral content are no more considered as conflicting instances. On the contrary, it is the fantastic which is now deemed to be the most powerful didactic tool. Fantasy thus ideologically serves the purposes of didacticism (Levy and Mendlesohn 34–35).

Victorian didacticism, however, had been put under strain by the knowledge derived from the new scientific discoveries of the era. The most unsettling results, under this aspect, came from the development of biology, and from the fall-out of evolutionary theory. According to the law of recapitulation, developed as a corollary to the evolution theory, the different stages of the human embryo correspond to the evolution of the species (Straley 3–4). In other words, ontogeny was believed to reproduce phylogeny. Robert Chambers' "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation" (1844) can be considered the manifesto of the recapitulation theory. As its title makes explicit, the purpose of recapitulation theory was to reaffirm a teleological path in the human evolution after the havoc created by Darwin's theory, which *de facto* had envisaged the appearance of the human species as a mere accident (Straley 6). One of the most interesting issues raised by the diffusion of the recapitulation theory in Victorian Britain regarded the status of the child. The impact of recapitulation theory grew even stronger when it was affirmed that, by extension, not only the embryo, but also the child's development after birth recapitulated the history of the human race (Straley 13). From that moment on, children started to be regularly associated with the simplest forms of animated life. This debate ultimately triggered disquieting questions about whether children had to be considered as animals (Straley 2).

Jessica Straley has explored how Victorian children's literature responded to the

children, namely their parents. Levy and Mendlesohn suggest that today, they would fall into the category of crossover fiction (31–38).

anxieties derived from these new scientific discoveries. In her analysis of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, Straley argues that the text exemplifies Victorian didacticism based on the recapitulation theory in children's literature. Written three years after the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), Kingsley's novel tells the story of an orphaned chimney sweeper named Tom, who manages to escape his cruel employer, Mr. Grimes. While running away, Tom falls into a river, where he is transformed into a water-baby. Underwater, Tom will receive a proper "natural" education, recapitulating the path of human evolution. Furthermore, his transformation into an amphibian urges Tom to adopt the scientific experimental method in order to fight for his survival (Straley 69). As this brief account of the plot shows, Kingsley clearly follows Herbert Spencer's pedagogy,²⁹ including the idea that children's education should replicate the process by which early men gained knowledge (Straley 62), thus advocating the reformatory power of science. But contrary to Spencer, Kingsley does not think that scientific knowledge alone can foster moral education in the child (Straley 63). Being a Church of England minister, Kingsley feels he has to reconcile science with religion: In order to become mature, good children should recapitulate morally irreproachable adult men (Straley 58). The core of his idea is best outlined in his 1874 essay "The Science of Health", where Kingsley argues that the British race is endangered by a progressive degeneration, against which he calls for a moral rejuvenation (Straley 65). Even Spencer was concerned about the moral development, but unlike Kingsley, he regarded literature, and more generally the imagination, as unnecessary for the development of moral sense (Straley 64). For Kingsley, instead, it is the imagination which

29 Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was an English polymath whose writings contributed to a wide range of subjects, including ethics, science, government, sociology, and education. He advocated the theory of evolution very early in his career. He is best remembered for his theory of social Darwinism and the expression "survival of the fittest", coined after having read Charles Darwin's *The Origins of the Species*. According to Spencer's theory, the principles of evolution – in particular, the notion of natural selection – can be applied to the study of the development of human societies (*Encyclopaedia Britannica.com*).

can foster knowledge of God in the youthful mind, and the imagination is spurred by literary education – in particular, by fairy tales (Straley 59). By grounding science in religion, the evolutionary theory is finally imbued with natural theology. Evolution is understood in terms of moral progress. Only morally irreproachable human beings are capable of the self-improvement required to keep up with the constant changes of nature (Straley 70). Ultimately, ethics is turned into the cause of evolution, instead of being its effect, as Straley observes (71), since only ethical beings will be able to pass natural selection.

By means of his evolutionary fairy tale, Kingsley wants to reaffirm that the fueling of the imagination by literature can yield results in children's education that science alone cannot possibly reach. As Straley shows, Kingsley's narrative advocates the idea that reading a literary text with a fairy tale plot can stimulate the cognitive process (73). The use of fantastical elements is meant to motivate the child to ask perceptive questions. The implied reader of *The Water Babies* is in fact a far better educated child than the protagonist Tom; he is addressed as a rational being who will reject the existence of water babies and other fantastic elements. Addressing the child with remarks and questions, the narrator rebukes the implied reader's empiricism and skepticism:

“But a water baby is contrary to nature.”

Well, but, my dear little man, you must learn to talk about such things, when you grow older, in a very different way from that. You must not talk about “ain't” and “can't” when you speak of this great wonderful world round you, of which the wisest man knows only the very smallest corner, and is, as the great Sir Isaac Newton said, only a child picking up pebbles on the shore of a boundless ocean. You must not say that this cannot be, or that that is contrary to nature. You do not know what Nature is, or what she can do; and nobody knows; not even Sir Robert

Murchison, or Professor Owen, or Professor Sedgwick, or Professor Huxley, or Mr. Darwin, or Professor Faraday, or Mr. Grove, or any other of the great men whom good boys are taught to respect. (Kingsley 46)

It is the awareness and acceptance of the fantastic which elevates the implied reader. Fantasy and nonsense provide that missing link in human evolution, which the evolution theory cannot account for, and which Kingsley cannot ignore (Straley 82). Scientific empiricism alone is powerless with regard to the increasing materialism of society: Only literary fancy can foster a fully moral individual development from bestiality to humanity (Straley 82–83). From this point of view, fairies seem to be the only creatures which make sense of the disquieting tensions inherent in modern society (Talairach-Vielmas 35).

2.3 “Do you believe in fairies?”

Alison B. Kavey has provided a thorough analysis of Barrie’s use of the British fairy tale tradition in folk and literary culture (Kavey 75). Drawing upon Katherine Brigg’s study on the British fairy tale tradition, Kavey argues, in line with the analysis of the previous section, that the proliferation of fairies in the nineteenth century testifies to the Victorian need for providing Britain with a new cultural identity (Kavey 89), one in which the privileged interaction between children and fairies was one of its most distinctive traits. Caroline Sumpter has explained that in the wake of the biological theory of recapitulation, children’s development was considered to reproduce the early stages of the cultural evolution of the nation. The fairy tale, according to this theory, represented one of the primary components of the individual’s and the world’s cultural evolution alike. Only grasping the way children understood fairy tales was it possible to interpret the evolution from primitive society to modern civilization (Sumpter 41). Authors such as George MacDonald and Charles Kingsley went so far as to claim that the author must delve into the fairy tale in order to reawaken his

youthful self (Sumpter 40).

When reading the Peter Pan fictions, it becomes clear that this tradition is dismissed by Barrie. Fairies are now depicted as tricksters who indulge in hedonism (Kavey 87). Barrie's intentions are thus not to revive national lore in order to foster a sense of national authenticity; instead, he uses fairies in literature to mock the Victorian respectability and the national myth of progressivism and productivity (Kavey 87), as this passage from *The Little White Bird* shows:

One of the great differences between the fairies and us is that they never do anything useful. When the first baby laughed for the first time, his laugh broke into pieces, and they all went skipping about. That was the beginning of fairies. They look tremendously busy, you know, as if they had not a moment to spare, but if you were to ask them what they are doing, they could not tell you in the least. They are frightfully ignorant, and everything they do is make believe.

(Barrie, *Little White Bird* 160)

However, at the turn of the century, the Victorian nostalgic fascination for fairies was also the expression of the darker sides of the cultural era. Fairyland, as Nicola Bown has shown, becomes a response to the anxiety of modernity – as a beautiful land in which to find an escape from the anonymous and uncertain life of the present (167ff.) According to Bown, fairies in Victorian literature and the figurative arts were not simply a symbol of rejuvenation. Most frequently, their representation evoked a tragic longing for the past, which could not be experienced any more. Paradoxically, their enchanting power lay in the sense of loss of the enchantment of the world, characteristic of late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Bown 180).

Bown's approach to the significance of fairies in the Victorian era casts a new light on the figure of the tiny fairy Tinker Bell in *Peter and Wendy*. Although she seems to play a liminal role in the narrative, Tinker Bell has in fact a decisive part in Barrie's dismissal of traditional fairy lore. If we compare her depiction in the novel to the conventional *fin de siècle* iconography of fairies portrayed as ethereal, sophisticated beings (see Appendix 2), it is apparent that Tinker Bell is a much more terrestrial, semi-human fairy. In her first scene, she is described as follows:

It was not really a light; it made this light by flashing about so quickly, but when it came to rest for a second you saw it was a fairy, no longer than your hand, but still growing. It was a girl called Tinker Bell exquisitely gowned in a skeleton leaf, cut low and square, through which her figure could be seen to the best advantage. She was slightly inclined to embonpoint. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 22)

It has been argued that while Wendy represents the middle-class, educated Victorian ideal of the woman-child, Tinker Bell embodies the lower-class, uneducated and eroticized femininity (Clark 308ff.; Roth 57), as the following passage shows:

“What does she say, Peter?”

He had to translate. “She is not very polite. She says you are a great ugly girl. And that she is my fairy.”

He tried to argue with Tink. “You know you can't be my fairy, Tink, because I am a gentleman and you are a lady.”

To this Tink replied in these words, “You silly ass,” and disappeared into the bathroom. “She is quite a common fairy,” Peter explained

apologetically, “she is called Tinker Bell because she mends the pots and kettles.” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 28–29)

Tinker Bell’s sexualized femininity is further emphasized by means of her devotion to Peter Pan, combined with a ferocious jealousy directed at Wendy, with whom she constantly competes for Peter’s attention. As a result of her jealousy, she tries to send Wendy away from Neverland:

A shorter adventure, and quite exciting, was Tinker Bell’s attempt, with the help of some street fairies, to have the sleeping Wendy conveyed on a great floating leaf to the mainland. Fortunately, the leaf gave way and Wendy woke, thinking it was bath-time, and swam back. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 72)

And she almost causes Wendy’s death when she persuades the Lost Boys to shoot at the girl:

The jealous fairy had now cast off all disguise of friendship, and was darting at her victim from every direction, pinching savagely each time she touched.

“Hullo Tink,” cried the wondering boys.

Tink’s reply rang out: “Peter wants you to shoot the Wendy,”

It was not in their nature to question when Peter ordered. “Let us do what Peter wishes,” cried the simple boys, “Quick, bows and arrows!”

All but Tootles popped down their trees. He had a bow and arrow with him, and Tink noted it, and ribbed her little hands.

“Quick, Tootles, quick,” she screamed. “Peter will be so pleased.”

Tootle excitedly fitted the arrow to his bow. “Out of the way, Tink,” he shouted, and then he fired, and Wendy fluttered to the ground with an arrow in her breast. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 56)

Tinker Bell is a liminal character whose existence relies entirely on the children’s will to believe in her. This liminal aspect is foregrounded in a famous episode in the chapter “Do you believe in fairies?”, when she risks dying to save Peter, who in turn has to appeal to the audience to save her:

Her voice was so low that at first he could not make out what she said. Then he made it out. She was saying that she thought she could get well again if children believed in fairies.

Peter flung out his arms. There were no children there, and it was night time; but he addressed all who might be dreaming of the Neverland, and who were therefore nearer to him than you think: boys and girls in their nighties, and naked papooses in their baskets hung from trees.

“Do you believe?” he cried.

Tink sat up in bed almost briskly to listen to her fate.

She fancied she heard answers in the affirmative, and then again she wasn’t sure.

“What do you think?” she asked Peter.

“If you believe,” he shouted to them, “clap your hands; don’t let Tinker die.”

Many clapped.

Some didn't.

A few little beasts hissed.

The clapping stopped suddenly; as if countless mothers had rushed to their nurseries to see what on earth was happening; but already Tink was saved.

First her voice grew strong, then she popped out of bed, then she was flashing through the room more merry and impudent than ever. She never thought of thanking those who believed, but she would have liked to get at the ones who had hissed (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 114).

However, I agree with Emily Clark that the fairy Tinker Bell enjoys a greater freedom from the social constraints and moral expectations than Wendy is subjected to (308). This is best exemplified by the description of Tinker's hidden bedroom in the underground home:

It was rough and simple, and not unlike what baby bears would have made of an underground house in the same circumstances. But there was one recess in the wall, no larger than a bird-cage, which was the private apartment of Tinker Bell. It could be shut off from the rest of the home by a tiny curtain, which Tink, who was most fastidious, always kept drawn when dressing and undressing. No woman, however large, could have had a more exquisite boudoir and bed-chamber combined. The couch, as she always called it, was a genuine Queen Mab, with club legs; and she varied the bedspreads according to what fruit-blossom was in season. Her mirror was a Puss-in-boots, of which there are now only three, unchipped, known to the fairy dealers; the wash-stand was a Pie-crust and reversible, the chest of

drawers an authentic Charming the Sixth, and the carpet and rugs of the best (the early) period of Margery and Robin. There was a chandelier from Tiddlywinks for the look of the ting, but of course she lit the residence herself. Tink was very contemptuous of the rest of the house, as indeed was perhaps inevitable, and her chamber, though beautiful, looked rather conceited, having the appearance of a nose permanently turned up. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 68–69)

Tinker Bell's room is described as a boudoir, a sensual place where Tinker can indulge in her voluptuous pleasures, which underlines once more the caricatural femininity of the tiny creature. As Clark contends, Tinker, unlike Wendy, has a room of her own, which she can adjust to her needs, free from the demands of husband and children. The ambiguities and contradictions which characterize the tiny fairy seem to me a strategy to mock the entire cultural construction of fairy tale lore which had consolidated through the centuries, and which was probably felt by Barrie to have exhausted its supposed regenerating potential. The narrative strategies used by Barrie, however, are not, in my opinion, those used at the turn of the century by the authors described by Bown. Instead of resorting to an evanescent figure threatened by the distortion of modernity (Bown 182ff.), Barrie provides his audience with an ambiguous fairy figure which resists complaisant categorization.

Barrie's subversion of the idea of a special link between fairy tales and moral rejuvenation in an idealized past, described by Kavey and Sumpter, can be related to Freud's theory about the role of fantasy in the human evolution. As I have demonstrated, according to Freud, human fantasy has its origin in a phylogenetic disposition, and the animistic belief in the omnipotence of thoughts is repressed, but never extinguished. Similarly, the need for imaginary tales in the Peter Pan fictions, in my view, is something intrinsically inherent in the

human mind, which is liable to re-surface at any time. The minds of the Darling siblings in the nursery are depicted as following:

I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a person's mind. Doctors sometimes draw maps of other parts of you, and your own map can become intensely interesting, but catch them trying to draw a map of a child's mind, which is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time. There are zigzag lines on it, just like your temperature on a card, and these are probably roads in the island, for the Neverland is always more or less an island [...].

Of course the Neverlands vary a good deal. John's, for instance, had a lagoon with flamingoes flying over it at which John was shooting while Michael who was very small, had a flamingo with lagoons flying over it. John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 9).

One of the reasons for the attraction exerted by Peter's Neverland on the Darling boys is the possibility to see their imaginary dreams, their Neverlands, come true:

Wendy and John and Michael stood on tip-toe in the air to get their first sight of the island. Strange to say, they all recognized it at once, and until fear fell upon them they hailed it, not as something long dreamt of and seen at last, but as familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays.

“John, there is the lagoon!”

“Wendy, look at the turtles burying their eggs in the sand.”

“I say, John, I see your flamingo with the broken leg!”

“Look, Michael, there is your cave!” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 40)

In Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, imagination has regained the uncontainable and potentially

disruptive force that had been tamed by Kingsley in order to serve his didacticism. The most distinctive trait of his hero, Peter Pan, is indeed his cockiness. Peter constantly defies moral norms:

“Don’t have a mother,” he said. Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very overrated persons.

(Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 25)

... Peter, boylike, was indifferent to appearances, and he was now jumping about in the wildest glee. Alas, he had already forgotten that he owed his bliss to Wendy. He thought he had attached the shadow himself: “How clever I am!” he crowed rapturously, “oh, the cleverness of me!” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 26)

Eventually Peter would dive through the air, and catch Michael just before he could strike the sea, and it was lovely the way he did it; but he always waited till the last moment, and you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life. Also he was fond of variety, and the sport that engrossed him one moment would suddenly cease to engage him, so there was always the possibility that the next time you fell he would let you go. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 38)

Barrie seems thus to endorse a critique of any form of pedagogy and didacticism, very similar to the attack launched by Walter Benjamin against the chastised “colonial pedagogy”, represented by the book of the Viennese reformer Alois Jalkotzky, *Märchen und Gegenwart: Das deutsche Volksmärchen und die Gegenwart*:

It will not be easy to find a book in which the disavowal of what is most authentic

and original would be advocated with the same degree of self-assurance, in which the child's delicate and secret imagination would be unconditionally understood as an emotional demand in the sense of a commodity-producing society, and in which education would be conceived with such a bleak unscrupulousness as a colonial sale opportunity for the cultural heritage.³⁰

In an insightful essay on the figure of the child in Benjamin's writings, Nicola Gess has argued that child's play, for Benjamin, fulfills a central role in exposing the fragility of adult moral ideas (683). This view is indebted to the disenchanting account of the child proposed by psychoanalysis. Like Freud, Benjamin thinks that those drives which are inhibited in adults present themselves in undisguised form in the child (Gess 684). Childhood represents on the ontogenetic level what primitiveness stands for in the phylogenetic development. Although a thorough account of Benjamin's description of the child as primitive and barbarian, and of its role in the dialectic treatment of history, would be beyond the scope of this research, it is important to underline at this point that in Benjamin's writings, the child, far from being the passive object of colonial pedagogy,³¹ affirms his sovereignty against the self-deceptive belief in fairy tales. The child does not sink into the identification with the hero: He is never self-absorbed by fairy tale material. He uses it instead in order to construct his new material world: "In fairytale motives, it [the child] builds up his world".³²

It can be argued that Barrie's Peter Pan fictions, likewise, represent a battle of the

30 In the original text: "Nicht leicht wird man ein Buch finden, in dem die Preisgabe des Echtesten und Ursprünglichsten mit gleicher Selbstverständlichkeit gefordert, in der die zarte und verschlossene Phantasie des Kindes gleich rückhaltlos als seelische Nachfrage im Sinne einer warenproduzierenden Gesellschaft verstanden und die Erziehung mit so trister Unbefangenheit als koloniale Absatzchance für die Kulturgüter angesehen würde" (Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften III 273).

31 The destructive pleasure that the child experiences in repeating cruel games, for example, is a moment of self-empowering according to Benjamin (Gess 684).

32 Quoted in the original text by Gess: "In Märchenmotiven baut es [das Kind] seine Welt auf" (705).

opposite and unreconciled tensions. However, unlike Benjamin's account, there is no dialectic moment in the Peter Pan fictions, which testifies to a progressive view of culture. In place of the emphasis on progress by means of the dialectic between destruction and construction, the Peter Pan fictions – and particularly the closure of *Peter and Wendy* – depict a tragic series with repeated emotional drawbacks for both the protagonist Peter and for its implied readers, as I will demonstrate in the following paragraph (Kavey 82).

2.3.1 Peter Pan's tragic return to reality

Sarah Gilead's essay "Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction" analyses those works of children's literature which, like *Peter and Wendy*, are characterised by a return-to-reality closure. These are fantasy stories which are inserted within the framework of reality, where the ending re-establishes the fictional reality setting which had been abandoned at the start of the story. Most commonly the reestablishment of order is fulfilled when the characters go back home after an adventure, when they awake from a dream, or when the magical beings have to leave the world of fictional reality. Gilead points out that the return-to-reality closure is not just a return to order. On the contrary, it may represent a further questioning of the significance of the fantasy, which ultimately challenges the return-to-reality frame. The return, in other words, does not always resolve the conflict between fantasy and reality.

In this respect, Gilead distinguishes three types of return-to-reality children's fiction. In the first type, the return coincides with the completed psychic growth of the protagonist (278). Fantasy is seen as an opportunity to grow up in an antisocial world before achieving social maturity. The best-known example of this, according to Gilead, is Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*. In the second type, the significance of fantasy is dumbed down by a consoling end which tries to ignore its disruptive force. Lewis Carroll's *Alice Books* represent an

example of this type. In the third type, finally, fantasy is presented in all its ambiguity: it both seduces the protagonists and shows its potential dangerousness. For Gilead, this third type, which is the most unsettling one, also includes Barrie's *Peter Pan*. In the first type, the potentially antisocial nature of fantasy is suppressed by making it beneficial for psychic growth. In the second type, fantasy is repressed. The sentimentalized account of Alice's dream by her sister at the end of the novel, for instance, serves adult escapism: "The closing frame of *Alice in Wonderland* postulates, though with ambivalent sentimentality, that the adult can recapture childhood or that childhood innocence can persist in the adult's storytelling imagination" (Gilead 283). But in the type represented by the Peter Pan fictions, fantasy is imbued with a tragic vision of reality. Indeed, according to Gilead, the initial escape from fictional reality to fantasy proves very disappointing in *Peter Pan*. This is most evident in the original ending of *Peter and Wendy*:

There could not have been a lovelier sight; but there was none to see it except a little boy who was staring at the window. He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 141)

Although the escape "raises the possibility of regressive slippage from adulthood to an idealized childhood", this possibility is eventually doomed to remain unfulfilled (Gilead 288). Indeed, the ending of the novel demonstrates that childhood cannot be but a transitional stage in the human development (Gilead 288). At the end there is no choice but to remain an eternal child or to become a responsible adult, as Wendy does (Jack 160); but both alternatives prove unsatisfactory. Peter's eternal childhood entails his being unemotional and burdened with cognitive deficiency (Gilead 287). On the other hand, adulthood does not guarantee freedom from the longing for an idealised past represented by childhood.

For Gilead, *Peter Pan* foregrounds the tragic contradictions of writing for children. If the escape into fantasy rekindles the belief in the possibility of attaining through fairy tale and folk tale the wholeness of the imaginary and idealised past, the unsettling ending of *Peter Pan* puts these illusions under strain again. Gilead's analysis of the return-to-reality closure in children's fiction, though not grounded in psychoanalysis, seems to reach conclusions very similar to the ones suggested by Rose. Gilead's analysis of *Peter Pan* can be used as a further argument to sustain the impossibility of children's literature already outlined by Rose. Furthermore, Rose's reflections find an echo in Gilead with regard to the insistence on the metaliterary aspects of the Peter Pan story, and more specifically on the impossibility of meeting both adults' and children's expectations in children's literature.

Barrie himself may have considered the epilogue of *Peter and Wendy* too gloomy for his readership. In 1908, an additional epilogue was added to the 1904 play. This scene, called "An Afterthought," was performed only once, and it remained unpublished until 1957. The last chapter of the current version of *Peter and Wendy*, "When Wendy grew up", is based upon "An Afterthought". In this scene, Peter is granted permission by Mrs. Darling to bring Wendy with him for one week each year to "do his spring cleaning." Still, Peter is depicted as selfish and as narcissistic as ever. As a consequence, he forgets to revisit Wendy for many years. When they finally meet again after a long time, Wendy is an adult woman, married and with a child, Jane:

Then she turned up the light, and Peter saw. He gave a cry of pain; and when the tall beautiful creature stooped to lift him in her arms he drew back sharply.

"What is it?" he cried again.

She had to tell him.

“I am old, Peter. I am ever so much more than twenty. I grew up a long ago.”

“You promised not to!”

“I couldn’t help it. I am a married woman Peter.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes, and the little girl in the bed is my baby.”

“No, she’s not.”

But he supposed she was: and he took a step towards the sleeping child with his fist upraised. Of course he did not strike her. He sat down on the floor and sobbed, and Wendy did not know how to comfort him, though she could have done so easily once. She was only a woman now, and she ran out of the room to try to think. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 151)

Moved by Peter’s dispirited reaction at the sight of a grown-up Wendy, the latter sends Jane to accompany Peter instead. Generation upon generation of mothers will let their daughters fly away with Peter: “and so it will go on, so long as children are gay and heartless” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 153).

As R. D. S. Jack contends, the ending of *Peter Pan* leaves both subject positions, adulthood as represented by the mothers (Wendy, Jane, Margaret etc.) and eternal childhood (Peter), entrapped in a tragic sense of loss. Those who have opted for adulthood and parenting will never again know the freedom that only a child’s imagination can give (Jack, “*Peter Pan*” as *Darwinian Myth* 160 ff.). Moreover, being inscribed in the phylogenetic chain, as Freud’s theory postulates, they will always be haunted by the illusion of the idealised past where their imagination could still affirm their omnipotence. Adults can

conjure up an idealised image of childhood only when childhood has ended (Gilead 286) so that the experience of loss haunts the desire for idealised childhood from the start, as Mrs. Darling recognizes at the outset of the novel while watching her daughter Wendy: “Oh, why can’t you remain like this for ever!” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 5). However, those who, like Peter, have chosen eternal youth will never know the joys of family and parental love. Indeed, the link between phylogenetic and ontogenetic memory has been severed for Peter. His memory cannot be nourished by the phylogenetic memory passed down from generation to generation. The “Afterthought” of *Peter and Wendy* tries somehow to dodge this stasis. I believe, though, that it is disputable whether the epilogue “When Wendy grew up” makes up for the sense of tragic loss or replicates it *ad infinitum*, extending it into the dimension of eternal, cyclical time.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked into the Peter Pan fictions through the lenses of Freud’s essays *The Uncanny* and *Totem and Taboo*. First of all, I have explored the didacticism by means of which Victorian *Kunstmärchen* respond to the cultural anxieties of evolution theory: here, fairy tale materials serve the purpose of accompanying children in their upbringing and fostering their moral *Bildung*. This is most evident in Charles Kingsley’s *The Water Babies*, which has been described as an evolutionary fairy tale. Conversely, Barrie’s *Peter Pan* seems to reject this didacticism. I have argued that the Peter Pan fictions, despite using fairy tale materials like other *Kunstmärchen*, resonate with Freud’s anthropological theory. The purity of childhood cannot be fixed in a state of lost primitiveness any more. The primitive, the animistic, the id-dominated stage of both ontogenesis and phylogenesis is always likely to emerge again from the repressed. To be sure, depicting children as “heartless” may also represent a form of liberation for children from the idealisation they have been subjected to

since the beginning of the cult of childhood: as Tatar points out, in the Peter Pan fictions children are finally set free from the pedestal they were set on in Victorian literature (Tatar 187). This act of rebellion invites a comparison with Benjamin's conception of the child as a rebellious barbarian. However, while Benjamin emphasises the dialectic moment represented by children's action in the world as the driving force of renewal and advancement for society, the insubordination of Peter Pan is rather characterised by a hedonistic self-referentiality which ends up in stasis.

In response to my initial question about the possibilities of defining *Peter Pan* as a *Kunstmärchen*, the outcome must necessarily be twofold. Notwithstanding the use of formal elements such as the return-to-reality closure described by Gilead and the fairy tale materials, Barrie does not subordinate magic to didacticism in order to convey a moral message to children. Besides, *Peter Pan*'s unsettling outcome does not fit into the mechanism so beautifully described by Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment*. According to Bettelheim, even the most gruesome fairy tales allow the child to find meaning in life (19). Fairy tales provide the child with ideas by means of which it is able to impose order on its confused mind and consequently on its life (Bettelheim 5):

Having taken the child on a trip into wondrous world, at its end the tale returns the child to reality, in a most reassuring manner. This teaches the child what he needs most to know at this stage of his development: that permitting one's fantasy to take hold of oneself for a while is not detrimental, provided he does not remain permanently caught up in it. At the story's end the hero returns to reality – a happy reality, but one devoid of magic. (Bettelheim 63)

My analysis has shown that the Peter Pan fictions, far from imposing order, project a sense of loss on both subject positions – adults and children. From the perspective of

Bettelheim, *Peter Pan* would thus fall into the same category as Andersen's *Kunstmärchen* "The Ugly Duckling". According to Bettelheim, this is a fairy tale which is enjoyable but does not help the child in growing up. "The Ugly Duckling" presents, in fact, the inexorability of fate: the story unfolds independent of the actions taken by the protagonist. Despite its happy ending, the story thus precludes a positive identification of the child reader with the hero in the struggle to resolve its conflicts autonomously (Bettelheim 105). Bettelheim's conclusion is that "The Ugly Duckling" is a story much more suitable for adults (105). Therefore, I would argue that, from the point of view of the probable response in the child reader, there are commonalities between *Peter Pan* and the characteristics of some of nineteenth-century's best-known *Kunstmärchen*, like those by Andersen.

Resuming an approach grounded in the way the text works, it has been argued that like other Victorian fantasies for children, *Peter Pan* never consciously abandons adult self-awareness (Knoepflmacher 499). Moreover, it makes overt references to its second implied reader: the adult. The child reader and the childlike author are equally addressed, rejecting a divide between the two audiences (Newton xvi- xvii). Shifting my focus from *Peter and Wendy* to the adult novel *The Little White Bird* (1902) and to the dedication to the play *Peter Pan* "To the Five" (1928), I will contend that Barrie's *Peter Pan* fictions testify to the increased powers of seduction exerted by children on adults in the Edwardian era.

3. Bonding with the Child

3.1 Introduction

The Edwardian era was characterised by unprecedented economic optimism. The rapid market growth stimulated new needs and economic fantasies which boosted the expansive consumerism of the time (Mickalites 2–3). Recent scholarship has explored how the Edwardian literary culture was influenced by these tendencies (Wild 1ff.). This thread of research has studied literary texts of the time against the backdrop of the new literary field,³³ focusing in particular on the dynamic between consumers and producers in order to explore how literary culture tried to appeal to the new consumer society. Such an approach seems to be particularly viable for the Peter Pan fictions, a series of works which gained the status of public phenomena from the start. As Humphrey Carpenter notes, Peter Pan’s immediate success surpassed that of all earlier children’s literary texts (170). In his study of children’s literature, Perry Nodelman has drawn upon Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the literary field to contend that literary success is determined by a writer’s degree of understanding of the field’s *habitus* (*Hidden Adult* 123) – the set of conventions and practices needed in order to acquire power (*Hidden Adult* 117). Viewed from the perspective of Nodelman’s Bourdieuan approach, it can be argued that Barrie fully internalised the *habitus* of his time. The high sense of awareness of the sociological and economic context of his literary activity must have contributed significantly to the success of his Peter Pan.

33 The notion of literary field derives from the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of the rules and conventions of cultural production. Nodelman has productively drawn upon Bourdieu’s theories in his monography on children’s literature (*Hidden Adult* 117ff.). According to Nodelman, children’s literature can be considered a restricted field within the larger field of cultural production. One of the consequences of considering children’s literature as a cultural field in Bourdieuan terms is the inclusion in its study of the relations between “the various practices of producing and consuming books intended for the young as commodities”. Each literary text viewed in this light unveils the specific position assumed within the literary field of the era by its writer, publisher, vendor, bookstore owner etc (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 118–119).

As these preliminaries make clear, in this chapter my frame of reference for the analysis of Barrie's narratives will be the historical and economic conditions of the Edwardian era, and consequently the cultural context in which the Peter Pan fictions appeared. In particular, I will contend that the Peter Pan materials are an expression of the imaginative literature which reflects the Edwardian fascination with the possibility of endless playfulness, in compliance with the dream of endless consumption (Mickalites 4).³⁴ While Victorian children's literature projects the image of the child as a frail creature to be protected by adults, the Edwardians tend to idealise childhood to exploit it as a repository of stability for adults' uncertainties.³⁵ To reach this purpose, children are usually depicted as unconditionally joyful. Furthermore, signs of social diversity are erased to present a homogeneous vision of Edwardian boys and girls. An unproblematised picture of childhood, in which class differences are overshadowed by their common identity as children, is deployed to foster a universal definition of the child as gay and innocent (Davin 51ff.).

At the base of this need for stability, however, lies a sense of imminent loss and grief about childhood enhanced by the approach of WWI. Childhood is resented as a short-lived, ephemeral condition characterised by a progressive fading away. The constant decrease in the birth rate since the 1850s, not compensated by a decrease in the mortality rate, combined with

34 According to Lerer, this new sense of playfulness had been emphasized by the technological advances of the time. The invention of the motorcar, or the airplane, for instance, consolidated a sense of technology as a plaything for adults (254).

35 In the literary field, this tendency is best represented by the success among adults of "gift books". After 1895, picture books for children took the format of gift books. Gift books were an evolution of the "toy books" developed in the 1850s by George Routledge and his partner Frederick Warne. Compared to previous children's picture books, toy books had larger formats, brightly coloured covers, and were sold at a higher price (Powers 13). Gift books further exploited the new techniques of colour printing to produce more lavishly illustrated luxury editions. Arthur Rackham's illustrations for the *Ingoldsby Legends* in 1898 marked a turning point in the process of increasing regard with which illustrated books for young readers were considered by adults. The figure of the illustrator progressively acquired more visibility and became one of the trademarks of the luxury book for children (Powers 13). The expensive gift book *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* – based upon the Peter Pan stories excerpted from Barrie's *The Little White Bird* – containing fifty colour plates by Rackham, published in 1906 by Hodder & Stoughton, is one of the best examples of the success of the gift book among young and adults. Julia Briggs observes that these books were considered highly treasurable objects to be enjoyed by the entire family. The references to Pre-Raphaelite art also testify to the publisher's wish to appeal to the adult aesthetic sense of the time (Briggs 182).

a sense of the fragility of the Empire triggered by the Anglo-Boer War³⁶ may have contributed to the obsession of middle-class families with the health and upbringing of their offspring, which nourished a much more introspective literature for children (Carpenter 17ff.). In many cases, as in Barrie's, this anguish was heightened by actual premature deaths which had marked private lives. The grief thus has to be counteracted by a constant effort to chase after the child both in adults' as well as in children's novels.

Furthermore, the Edwardian longing for childhood has to be related to the changes in the new imperial ideology. The narrative of progress and the civilising mission which had been at the basis of the original British colonialist project was progressively substituted by what Deane has defined an "imperial play ethic" grounded in a colonial vision of endless competition, adventure, and absence of universal moral law (Deane 88). Framed by this new cultural and ideological scenario, the idea of enduring boyishness came to represent the new identity of the colonial adventure (Deane 86). A boyish spirit was called for as the new driving force of the great game of empire. It is not surprising then that Robert Baden-Powell, who had founded the Boy Scout Movement in 1908, convinced that the future of the Empire was in the hands of his boys, was a great admirer of Barrie's play *Peter Pan* (Hollindale 200). The British diplomat Alfred Miller called his circle of young administrators in South Africa the "Kindergarten"; and the Prime Minister of Cape Colony, Cecil Rhodes, already in his

36 Jonathan Wild has motivated the general British sense of uneasiness about the status of the Empire as a consequence of the Anglo-Boer War. According to Wild, this was the first imperial war waged against a "fellow race", issued from the same European Protestant stock as the British forces (11–13). This realization, in Wild's view, caused a sense of discomfort with regard to the position of British Imperialism at the turn of the century. However, the sense of fragility which permeated the Edwardian era has more profound reasons than those argued by Wild. The defeats of the Black Week during the second Boer War in 1899, when the British Army lost three battles in one week, may have contributed to the sense of insecurity of the time. But there were other, more compelling factors which undermined self-confidence in the Edwardian era. John Darwin has given a thorough account of the origins of Edwardian anxiety. The rise of Germany as a new European industrial and military power forced Britain into an arms race with its new competitor. British productivity was beginning to lag behind the ascending powers, namely the US and Germany, and domestic politics was not able to find an agreement on taxation and the constitution. Furthermore, domestic stability was threatened by the Irish question, especially after 1910. All these circumstances contributed to the feeling that late Victorian Britain was a hegemony in decline (Darwin 255).

forties, is claimed to have rejoiced shouting “I am a boy! I am a boy! Of course I shall never get old” (Deane 85). The idea of a boyish politics was so strong that it seemed as if men had to never grow up if they wanted to rule successfully.³⁷

In order to carry out my research, I will proceed along two strands of research. In the first part, I will focus on the depiction of the child as the object of adult commercial desire in Barrie’s prequel to *Peter Pan*, the novel *The Little White Bird*. Keeping in mind the figure of the Edwardian child as connected with the expansive consumerism of the era, I will show that the ambiguous relationship that the adult bachelor, Captain W., establishes with the child David is an expression of the Edwardian theme of staging adults on a par with children. To gain the favours of David, Captain W. has to first acknowledge and allow himself the dream of endless playfulness triggered by urban consumerism. Besides, I will explore to what extent Captain W. competes with David’s mother Mary for the role of the parent. Despite admitting that he cannot rival Mary’s motherhood, he still affirms the superiority of the symbolic fatherhood of the book he is writing.

In the second part of the chapter, I will illustrate how the desire to level the distinction between adult and child is incarnated by the dedication “To the Five” added to the play *Peter Pan* and written presumably in the early 1920s. Here, Barrie reveals that he has no recollection of having written *Peter Pan*. I will contend that behind this apparent denial of authorship lies hidden Barrie’s will to bond with the five Llewelyn Davies boys as adjunct authors of the story of Peter Pan. Not only is the barrier between children and adults likely to dissolve when adults are as lost as children in the whimsical world of consumer society as happens in *The Little White Bird*, but also another barrier is erased in the dedication: the one between the creators and the consumers of stories. The creator can continue to provide stories

³⁷ Lerer refers to King Edward VII – who, incidentally, did not ascend the throne until he was almost sixty – being constantly portrayed as a man boyishly intrigued by military parades, adventures, tea parties (254).

only as long as he finds a muse in childhood. When the time comes to detach himself from the boys, Barrie fashions himself in “To the Five” as just as barred from the intimacy as Peter Pan was. The nostalgic tone is emphasised by a sense of loss determined by the author’s recognition that the source of inspiration represented by the boys throughout his career has disappeared, both as a consequence of the tragic deaths of George and Michael and due to the fact that the other boys have grown up. Growing up ultimately equals dying in Barrie’s narrative world, since the capacity to believe in stories, which is characteristic of childhood, represents an indispensable source of the creative process and the only reason for considering life worth living.

3.2 *The Little White Bird* and Edwardian Consumer Culture

As discussed above, Rose has shown in *The Case of Peter Pan* how the figure of the child is used by adult writers in children’s literature to ward off their anxieties. James Kincaid, in his similarly influential book *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, has explored the constructedness of the child in children’s literature from another cultural perspective. For Kincaid, the child is a vacuous category that adults fill with those anxieties they are not able to come to grips with, using it as a “repository of cultural needs” (78–79). The purity of childhood is desirable to adults. But in order to keep at bay the anxieties deriving from the sexual attraction that adults inevitably feel for children – and which they are not able to get rid of – adults have created the figure of the paedophile to set a limit to this fascination sensed as improper. While the child is created as an object of desire, the paedophile is the one who desires: the paedophile acts out the range of attitudes and behaviours made compulsory by the role we have given to the child (Kincaid 5). Assuming the role of the abject, the deformed monster (Coats 4–5), the paedophile as psychological function becomes ultimately a necessary scapegoat to our cultural life (Kincaid 5).

Moreover, Kincaid contends that the figure of the child elicits an erotic of loss grounded in the developmental model of the child that has established itself in the modern age (67). This vision of the child as an adult-to-be has been accompanied since the Victorian age by the desire to freeze childhood before it fades away: “Change is thus arrested, made an object for contemplation, for tender regret, for sexual arousal” (Kincaid 67). Consequently, Kincaid explains the cultural obsession with photographs of children in terms of Freudian mastery over the child: photos allow us to freeze the child forever (68). Viewed under this aspect, Barrie’s photographic record of the Llewelyn boys in *The Boys Castaways of Black Lake Island* can be considered the first of his attempts at retrieving what had been lost; after all, he himself claimed that “nothing that happens after we are twelve matters very much” (Birkin 8).

In the novel *The Little White Bird*, it is impossible to miss disquieting shades of the paedophiliac tendencies described by Kincaid in the following passage where the young boy David spends the night at his benefactor Captain W.’s home:

David and I had a tremendous adventure. It was this, he passed the night with me. We had often talked of it as a possible thing, and at last Mary consented to our having it.

[...] At twenty-five past six I turned on the hot water in the bath, and covertly swallowed a small glass of brandy. I then said, “Half-past six; time for little boys to be in bed.” [...]

Then I placed my hand carelessly on his shoulder, like one a trifle bored by the dull routine of putting my little boys to bed, and conducted him to the night nursery, which had lately been my private chamber. [...]

David watched my preparations with distasteful levity, but anon made a noble amend by abruptly offering his foot as if he had no longer use for it, and I knew

by intuition that he expected me to take off his boots. I took them off with all the coolness of an old man, and then I placed him on my knee and removed his blouse. This was a delightful experience, but I think I remained wonderfully calm until I came somewhat too suddenly to his little braces, which agitated me profoundly.

I cannot proceed in public with the disrobing of David. [...]

“You are sleeping with me to-night, you know David,” I said.

“I didn’t know,” he replied, a little troubled but trying not to be a nuisance. [...]

“You are not frightened, are you?”

“Am I not?” he answered politely, and I knew his hand was groping in the darkness, so I put out mine and he held on tightly to one finger.

“I am not frightened now,” he whispered.

“And there is nothing else you want?”

“Is there not?” he again asked politely. “Are you sure there’s not?” he added.

“What can it be, David?”

“I don’t take up very much room,” the far-away voice said.

“Why, David,” said I, sitting up, “do you want to come into my bed?”

“Mother said I wasn’t to want it unless you wanted it first,” he squeaked.

“It is what I have been wanting all the time,” said I, and then without more ado the little white figure rose and flung itself at me. For the rest of the night he lay on me and across me, and sometimes his feet were at the bottom of the bed and sometimes on the pillow, but he always retained possession of my finger, and occasionally he woke me to say that he was sleeping with me. I had not a good night. I lay thinking.

Of this little boy, who, in the midst of his play while I undressed him, had suddenly buried his head on my knees.

Of the woman who had been for him who could be sufficiently daring.

Of David's dripping little form in the bath, and how when I essayed to catch him he had slipped from my arms like a trout.

Of how I stood by the open door listening to his sweet breathing, had stood so long that I forgot his name and called him Timothy. (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 209–214)

Rose argues that *The Little White Bird* is a story about story-telling (22). However, this is not an innocent act of love on the part of the narrator, according to Rose. By talking to the child, the narrator actually attempts to make a claim on him: “the narrator is trying to steal the child”, and his involvement derives from an “unconsummated sexual desire for which David is the substitute and replacement” (Rose 23). To our contemporary sensibility, it seems surprising that the public of the time was not in the least upset by the ambiguity of the scene. After the publication of *The Little White Bird* in 1902, Barrie was constantly approached in Kensington Gardens by enthusiastic mothers and sons who revered him despite what Wulschläger has described as an echo of “Nabokovian sadism” in the novel (124). In my opinion, the celebration of youth in *The Little White Bird* captivated the public to the point that it possibly outweighed the uncomfortable traits of the novel. Barrie's public was possibly taken in by the marvellous capacity for generating stories considered characteristic of youth as staged in the novel's narrative.

Adrienne Gavin, in her contribution to a volume on Edwardian children's fiction, defines *The Little White Bird* as distinctively representative of its era. Gavin too interprets the novel as symptomatic of the Edwardian desire to fix childhood on the page. Most significantly, this desire in Edwardian children's literature is represented by the relationship

between bachelors (or bachelor-like men) and child characters (Gavin 53). Indeed, it is Edwardian fiction which allows male characters to overtly express sympathy, or even longing for children, as in Rudyard Kipling's short story "They", Edith Nesbit's *Bastable* books, or Henry de Vere Stacpoole's *The Blue Lagoon* (1906). Gavin interprets the sense of loss conveyed by these texts as an expression of the Edwardian tension between the desire to capture the child in fiction and the awareness that childhood cannot last forever. This unresolved conflict leads to a sense of frustration caused by the awareness that the immortalised fictional children can only be the simulacra of real ones (Gavin 61).

Carey Mickalites further explores the novel in the cultural context of the Edwardian era, introducing a new perspective which, in my opinion, serves to highlight its significance in the context of the Peter Pan fictions. According to Mickalites, there is a clear relationship between the Edwardian child figure and the expansive consumerism of the Edwardian era. Adults identified with the child in an attempt to be granted the possibility of enjoying the endless consumption, which was posited as the new ideal in the Edwardian era (Mickalites 4). The starting point of Mickalites' analysis is the episode in Chapter 5 where Captain W. decides to buy a rocking horse for David, who is by then three months old. Here, Captain W.'s attachment to the child represents an act of competition also with the father, depicted as an artist of uncertain talent who cannot even provide financial stability for his family.³⁸ But most significantly, this episode is the bachelor's first attempt at bonding with the boy. The

38 Barrie's usually disparaging depiction of fathers (David's father, in this case, but also Mr. Darling) can be interpreted as a result of the general decline of fatherly authority in the course of the Victorian age. Natalie McKnight has explored the reasons for this decline in her "Introduction" to the volume *Fathers in Victorian Fiction*. According to McKnight, the role of fathers significantly changed in the course of the nineteenth century. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, most fathers belonging to the working and middle-class who used to work at home as craftsmen in the earlier centuries were removed from the domestic space to spend their working days at their working place. Education then became a mother's affair, marked by the establishment of what is traditionally known the birth of the "cult of motherhood" in the Victorian age. Moreover, efforts made by fathers to retain their lost power by developing stern attitudes towards their children ended up in a further distancing between fathers and their siblings. The figure of the father in Victorian fictions shows the disappearance of domestic fatherhood, substituted by fatherly figures who are either tyrannical, or absent, and in any case always devoid of credible authority (McKnight 1-8).

episode recounts the excursion of Captain W. to Lowther Arcade, the shopping mall built in 1830 and named after Lord Lowther, whose toy shop was a pole of attraction for children as well as adults:³⁹

Dear Lowther Arcade! Oftimes have we wandered agape among thy enchanted palaces, Porthos and I, David and I, David and Porthos and I. I have heard that thou art are vulgar, but I cannot see now, unless it be that tattered children haunt thy portals, those awful yet smiling entrances to so much joy. To the Arcade there are two entrances, and with much to be sung in laudation of that which opens from the Strand I yet on the whole prefer the other as the more truly romantic, because it is there the tattered ones congregate, waiting to see the Davids emerge with the magic lamp. We have always a penny for them, and I have known them, before entering the Arcade with it, retire (but wither?) to wash: surely the prettiest of all compliments that are paid to the home of toys.
(Barrie, *Little White Bird* 50)

In these passages, the urban bachelor resonates with the turn of the century literary *flâneurs*. Mickalites' reference to Benjamin's *flâneur* in *The Arcades Project* is poignant, as it allows an assessment of the different approaches to commodification in the two types of *flânerie* described by Benjamin and Barrie respectively:

It is the gaze of the flâneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller. The flâneur still stands on the threshold—of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd. Early

³⁹ The Lowther Arcade was a twenty-four-meter-long arcade topped with glass domes built in 1830 on the Strand. When it was opened, the Arcade hosted 24 shops which used to sell luxury items. Since the mid nineteenth century most of these shops became toyshops. For this reason, the Arcade was very popular among children. See *Exploring-london.com*.

contributions to a physiognomics of the crowd are found in Engels and Poe. The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city beckons to the flâneur as phantasmagoria—now a landscape, now a room. Both become elements of the department store, which makes use of flânerie itself to sell goods. The department store is the last promenade for the flâneur. (Benjamin, *Arcades Project* 10) ⁴⁰

Mickalites rightly underscores the different stances towards commodity culture foregrounded by Barrie and Benjamin respectively. Far from indulging unproblematically in the pleasures of the market, Benjamin's *flâneur* laments the ahistorical tendencies of capitalism, where merchandise – and the labour force behind it – is doomed to fall into anonymity as soon as it is labelled as outmoded in order to be substituted by new products. This critical stance presents a stark contrast to Captain W.'s regrets in *The Little White Bird* about the imminent demise of the warehouse which is about to start:

And now, O Arcade, so much fairer than thy West End brother, we are told that thou art doomed, anon to be turned into an eatinghouse or hive for usurers, something ranking useful. All thy delights are under notice to quit. The Noah's arks are packed one within another, with clockwork horses harnessed to them; the soldiers, knapsack on back, are kissing their hands to the dear foolish girls, who, however, will not be left behind them all the four-footed things gather around the elephant, who is overfull of drawing-room furniture; the birds flutter

40 "Es ist der Blick des Flaneurs, dessen Lebensform die kommende trostlose des Großstadtmenschen noch mit einem versöhnenden Schimmer umspielt. Der Flaneur steht noch auf der Schwelle, der Großstadt sowohl wie der Bürgerklasse. Keine von beiden hat ihn noch überwältigt. In keine von beiden ist er zu Hause. Er sucht sein Asyl in der Menge. Frühe Beiträge zur Physiognomik der Menge finden sich bei Engels und Poe. Die Menge ist der Schleier, durch den hindurch dem Flaneur die gewohnte Stadt als Phantasmagorie winkt. In ihr ist sie bald Landschaft, bald Stube. Beide bauen dann das Warenhaus auf, das die Flanerie selber dem Warenumsatz nutzbar macht" (Benjamin, *Illuminationen* 179).

their wings; the man with the scythe mows his way through the crowd; the balloons tug at their strings; the ships rock under a swell of sail, everything is getting ready for the mighty exodus into the Strand. Tears will be shed.

So we bought the horse in the Lowther Arcade [...] (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 50–51)

Captain W.'s excursion to the Lowther Arcade demonstrates to what extent his desire is inspired by and ultimately dependent on the child. His delight in buying is made possible by his identification with the child. At the same time, the transience of childhood is a constant reminder of the inevitable limits to the consumer's pleasure (Mickalites 5).

This move becomes clear when considering the new role played by consumer culture at the end of the nineteenth century in guiding parents' need to control and influence the child. As Teresa Michals has demonstrated, the emergence of the idea of a child's world as distinct from adult life, concomitant with the rise of a relatively well-off middle class, is one of the factors which contributed to the birth of the consumer society (29). It is at the end of the nineteenth century that the growth of a stronger middle-class consciousness favours the idea of the young as consumers who have to be educated and for whom suited books and toys have to be bought.

The idea of buying educational toys for children is a direct consequence of this attitude. Good toys are those which stimulate skills and abilities that will be valuable in adult life (Michals 30ff.). The debate between good and bad toys had been broached quite openly in a classic of children's literature, Maria Egde worth's *The Purple Jar* (1796), a moral tale about the necessity of instructing children on the importance of buying useful items instead of indulging in impulse buying (Nelson 143). Nodelman has analysed the pitfalls of Edgeworth's didacticism in his study on children's literature. Rosamund's mother does not try to dissuade her daughter from buying a useless jar in an open way. Instead, she subtly

manipulates Rosamund to bring her to share her view of the world. The didacticism of the novel foregrounds the pedagogic ideal of letting children learn by their own experience: in this case by making them feel a sense of guilt for indulging in consumerist desires (Nodelman, *Hidden Adult* 33–35). By contrast, Barrie’s Captain W. rejects his role as a moral guide to David. As we get to know in the novel, he only tells David tales which have no moral application (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 110); and as David’s father observes, the rocking horse the Captain buys in the Lowther Arcade does not fit the category of educational toys at all.⁴¹ Captain W. buys because like Rosamund, the protagonist of *The Purple Jar*; he cannot resist the allure of commodity (Michals 34). His behaviour thus coincides with the child’s wish for pleasure, not with the adult’s desire to teach moral values.

As Denisoff has argued, at the turn of the century, adults’ irrational consumerist desires are the expression of another ambiguity in the social dynamic – adults developing a fascination for toys which they see as tools to retain at least something of their own childhood (1ff.). Similarly, Wulschläger defines *Peter Pan* as “a wish-fulfillment story about the triumph of youth over age which caught the mood of the new young century” (126). Viewed in this light, *The Little White Bird* represents the text, in the context of the Peter Pan fictions, which best exemplifies the adults’ fascination for youth at the turn of the century and their desire to be on a par with children, sharing the same consumer mood. This explains, in my opinion, why the contemporary sexual ambiguity of the passages above did not hinder the novel’s success. The novel most certainly touched upon wishes and desires which for the public of the era were much more relevant than its possible sexual hints. The uncomfortable traits of the relationship between Captain W. and Davis were obscured by the fascination that the narrative creates around the major concerns of the time: adults’ desire to bond with

41 “Picture it,” said he, “a rocking horse for a child not three months old!” (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 52).

children as consumers.

It could be argued, as Karen Coats does, that Barrie's Peter Pan fictions display a relationship between childhood and adulthood characterised by a disconcerting antagonism. Although I would not go as far as to say that this turned into a form of child-hating, as Coats does (4ff.), I agree with her conclusion that the vision of childhood as a separate state from adulthood which had characterised the Victorian age becomes the foundation, in the Edwardian era, of an unconditional longing for children in adults. More than antagonism, in my opinion, there is a struggle to remain as youthful and joyful as possible. More than desiring to protect children, adults seem to desire identification with them. And yet, the recognition of this impossibility tinges childhood with a nostalgic reverence, which in the Peter Pan fictions becomes the main inspiration for Barrie's narrative.

3.3 "To the Five"

The Little White Bird is a metaliterary reflection on the creative process. It is not just the story of David's coming-to-be which is recounted but also the genesis of *The Little White Bird* as a work of art. More specifically, in my opinion, the novel foregrounds two acts of creativity at the same time. On the one hand, Mary's act of giving birth to David (and subsequently to her second daughter, Barbara); on the other hand, the artistic creation of the novel *The Little White Bird* by Captain W. Indeed, at the end of the novel we get to know that even Mary had the ambition of writing a novel, which she finally gives up in order to give birth to a "little bird" in flesh and bones. At this point, Captain W. ironically revendicates the supremacy of his creation to Mary's:

I decided, unknown even to David, to write the book "The Little White Bird", of which she [Mary] had proved herself incapable, and then when, in the fulness of time, she held her baby on high, implying that she had done a big thing, I was to

hold up the book. (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 268)

Although in the last Chapter of *The Little White Bird* Captain W. decides to dedicate the novel to Mary, in the battle for parenting staged by the text, Captain W. still maintains that his being father to his book is more valuable than Mary's motherhood, as the dedication shows:

“Madam” (I wrote wittily), “I have no desire to exult over you, yet I should show a lamentable obtuseness to the irony of things were I not to dedicate this work to you. For its inception is yours, and in your more ambitious days you thought to write the tale of the little white bird yourself. Why you so early deserted the nest is not for me to inquire. It now appears that you were otherwise occupied. *In fine, madam, you chose the lower road, and contented yourself with obtaining the Bird. May I point out, by presenting you with this dedication, that in the meantime I have become the parent of the Book? To you the shadow, to me the substance.* (Barrie, *Little White Bird* 275, emphasis added)

As it is plain to see, in *The Little White Bird* authorial mastery over the creative work is clearly affirmed. Even if the novel develops as a series of stories and adventures in which both Captain W. and David have been involved with equal pleasure, Captain W. has no hesitations in declaring that he is the father of the book, an achievement superior to Mary's act of motherhood. Once he has presented himself as father of the book, even David starts calling him father.

In *The Little White Bird*, Captain W.'s dedication at the end of the novel is ultimately his last creative act. This dedication is a narrative device which pertains to the fictional world of the novel. However, in the Peter Pan fictions we encounter another “real” dedication,

which is even more representative of the relationship between adult authorial needs and childhood as source of inspiration. The dedication in question is the one written by Barrie for the play *Peter Pan* with the title “To the Five”. The dedication was written not earlier than 1920, and it appeared for the first time on the occasion of the publishing of the play in 1928. It is dedicated to the five sons of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies: George, Jack, Peter, Michael, and Nicholas (Nico), who are referred to by numbers throughout the text.⁴² Although at the time of the publication both George and Michael were dead, the value of the dedication is highly symbolical.

According to Gérard Genette’s narratological analysis there are two types of dedications. The first type is the one by means of which a specific copy of a book is dedicated to a person, which typically has a private character. Genette calls this type a *dédicace d’exemplaire*. The second type of dedication instead concerns the symbolic value of a work of art: this is the *dédicace d’oeuvre* (Genette 120). The *dédicace d’oeuvre*, whose origin dates back to Antiquity, has a public and social value which the former does not have. While in Antiquity this was essentially an economic one in the form of remunerative activity, starting from the nineteenth century, the dedication of a work of art acquires the value of a sort of preface (Genette 127). Genette also observes the ambiguity which characterises the addressee of the *dédicace d’oeuvre*. When dedicating his work of art, the writer has necessarily two addressees in mind: the real dedicatee and the reader. Genette thus underlines the performative value of the dedication defined as *dédicace d’oeuvre*.

This is most evident in Barrie’s dedication “To the Five” which corresponds well to what Genette describes as *dédicace d’oeuvre*. The author fashions the genesis of his entire work as an artist as the result of his encounter with the five boys to the point that he questions

⁴² Numbers were assigned by Barrie following the date of birth order of the Llewelyn Davies boys. No. 1 is George, No. 2 is Jack, No. 3 is Peter, No. 4 is Michael, No. 5 is Nico (Alton 392).

whether he is entitled to declare himself the author of his works:

Some disquieting confessions must be made in printing at last the play *Peter Pan*; among them this, that I have no recollection of having written it.

[...] As for myself, 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, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 75)

[...] This brings us back to my uncomfortable admission that I have no recollection of writing the play of *Peter Pan*, now being published for the first time so long after he made his bow upon stage. You had played it until you tired of it, and tossed it in the air and gored it and left it derelict in the mud and went on your way singing other song; and then I stole it back and sewed some of the gory fragments together with a pen-nib. (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 76)

In the ending of the novel *The Little White Bird*, as it has been argued above, Captain W. can claim to have written a big work to which Mary's procreative act is no match. By contrast, almost at the end of his career, Barrie's act of self-fashioning as an acclaimed author is much less aimed at affirming the agency of his authority as creator. The increased instability of "To the Five" compared to *The Little White Bird* is the outcome of two opposite recognitions which are displayed contemporarily in the dedication. The author of the dedication underlines that the end of childhood is the end of the capacity to believe. From this perspective, I should say that the poetic stance of the text is closer to *Peter and Wendy's* notion of adulthood as loss. The possibility of maintaining a relationship between childhood and adulthood offered by the addition of the "Afterthought" to the original ending is here debunked again. "To the Five", in fact, resonates more with the image of Peter Pan as forever barred from the nursery presented in the original version of the story. At the same time,

however, in the dedication Barrie once again resorts to his lifelong insistence on the fact that childhood is not just a biological stage of human development but a disposition of the soul.

This is the will to stick to the belief in stories, as the episode recounted in the last part of the dedication makes clear:

My grandest triumph, the best thing in the play *Peter Pan* (though it is not in it), is that long after No. 4 had ceased to believe,⁴³ I brought him back to the faith for at least two minutes. We were on our way in a boat to fish the Outer Hebrides (where we caught *Mary Rose*),⁴⁴ and though it was a journey of days he wore his fishing basket on his sack all the time, so as to be able to begin at once. His pain was the absence of Johnny Mackay, for Johnny was the loved gillie of the previous summer who had taught him everything that is worth knowing (which is a matter of flies) but could not be with us in time as he would have had to cross and re-cross Scotland to reach us. As the boat drew near the Kyle of Lochalsh pier I told Nos. 4 and 5 it was such a famous wishing pier that they had now but to wish and they should have. No. 5 believed at once [...], but No. 4 thought it more of my untimely nonsense and doggedly decline to humour me. 'Whom do you want to see the most, No. 4?' 'Of course I would like most to see Johnny Mackay,' 'Well, then wish for him'. 'Oh, rot.' 'It can't do any harm to wish.' Contemptuously he wished, and as the ropes were thrown on the pier he saw Johnny waiting for him, loaded with angling paraphernalia. I know no one less like a fairy than Johnny Mackay, but for two minutes No. 4 was quivering in another world than ours. When we came to he gave me a smile

43 No. 4 in the text is Michael, probably Barrie's best-loved boy; or, at least, the one who developed the greatest affection for Barrie.

44 *Mary Rose* is the title of the spooky play first produced in 1920. This reference is the evidence that the dedication was written at the earliest after the appearance of the play.

which meant that we understood each other, and thereafter neglected me for a month, being always with Johnny. As I have said, this episode is not in the play; so though I dedicate *Peter Pan* to you I keep a smile, with the few other broken fragments of immortality that have come my way. (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 86)

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have selected some passages from those Peter Pan fictions which were marketed for adults, namely the novel *The Little White Bird* and the dedication to the play *Peter Pan*, in order to highlight to what extent the Peter Pan materials are an expression of the cultural climate of the Edwardian era. I have explored the relationship between the rise of a middle-class concerned with the upbringing of its children and the growth of consumer culture. Beyond the consideration that the increased interest in educational concerns may have been determined by lower birth rates and increased wealth, I have also argued that childhood represents for the Edwardians the dream of endless playfulness and imaginative power. While caring for the child, adults also aimed at retrieving their own ended childhood, re-enacting through children the world made of adventures, dreams, and endless possibilities which adulthood seemed to erase forever.

The sense of tragic loss described in Chapter 2 with regard to *Peter and Wendy* replicates itself only in the dedication of the play *Peter Pan* published under the title “To the Five”. Indeed, I have argued that the *The Little White Bird* and “To the Five” testify to distinct concerns. The novel *The Little White Bird* concludes with a self-assertive statement about the origin of the work of art in the creative work of the author, in this case Captain W., maintaining a distinction and a hierarchy between the producer and the consumer of the creative work. Captain W., as a matter of fact, proudly ends his account with the achievement

of the book. Self-irony, and the admission of not having procreated physically, does not prevent the urban bachelor from putting an end to his story with a paternalistic good wish for Mary and her family. By contrast, the tone of the dedication “To the Five” is, in my opinion, much gloomier. Barrie is no more interested in showing mastery over his work and instead hails the five boys as inceptors of the Peter Pan fictions. By means of these two texts, I have shown the significance of the Edwardian wish for bonding with the child in the Peter Pan fictions. In *The Little White Bird* this means enjoying the same dream of endless playfulness and consumer desire as children would do. In the dedication “To the Five”, bonding with the child means having lost pretensions of mastery over the creative process. Additionally, Barrie’s grief about the end of the five boys’ childhood seems to have been heightened by the physical deaths of some of the boys at the time of the composition of the dedication.

In the next chapter, I will explore the reasons for the long-lasting allure of *Peter and Wendy* among the public, grounding my research in ideology criticism. I will explore to what extent the canonisation of *Peter Pan* in school education and the deployment of Barrie’s fictional world in cinema have been made possible by a masterly use of ideologic manipulation. I will thus show through a diachronic analysis how each ideologic shift, according to the main concerns of the era, has drawn upon distinct aspects of the Peter Pan fictions. The fact that each ideologic manipulation has been grounded in different elements testifies to the power of ideology, but also to the richness in the layers of meaning of the Peter Pan materials.

4. Peter Pan and Ideology: ISA Education and ISA Cultural Apparatus

4.1 Introduction

Rose's study on children's literature makes use of psychoanalysis to show to what extent the Peter Pan story has been instrumental in keeping alive adult desires and expectations about children and childhood. In this chapter, I will explore the reasons for Peter Pan's lasting popularity more than one hundred years after the publication of the children's novel *Peter and Wendy*. In order to investigate the mechanisms by means of which the Peter Pan story has gained the status of a cultural icon, I will draw upon ideology criticism and in particular upon the Althusserian notion of the ISA, Ideological State Apparatus.

The main contribution of Louis Althusser (1918–1990) to ideology criticism is his analysis of the ways in which subjects in capitalistic societies are moulded by ideology. According to Althusser, the perpetuation of the capitalistic system is largely made possible by its mechanisms of reproduction activated by the actions of ISAs, Ideological State Apparatuses.⁴⁵ Schools, families, political parties, and the arts are examples of ISAs. These are institutions created in a capitalistic society to mobilise the subjects' consent to the system. Althusser models his analysis on Lacan's theory of the tripartite nature of the subject's formation in the Imaginary, the Real, and the Symbolic. Drawing upon the primordial state of consciousness – the Imaginary, ideology hails subjects in such a way that they can recognise themselves as the addressees of the hail (*Norton Anthology* 1356). The mechanism of ideology thus reproduces what happens in the Lacanian mirror stage of human development when individuals enjoy an illusory sense of unity when they recognise themselves in the

⁴⁵ Althusser proposes a list of ISAs which includes: religious ISA, educational ISA, family ISA, legal ISA, political ISA, trade-union ISA, communication ISA, cultural ISA. Ideological State Apparatuses function by means of ideology. By contrast, Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), the other instrument by means of which capitalism is upheld, work by repression. They include the prison system, the army, the police. Nevertheless, Althusser points out that repression is ultimately a secondary, concealed function of ISAs too (*Norton Anthology* 1342).

mirror. As soon as the individual recognises that he has been interpellated, he becomes a subject exposed to ideology; this recognition becomes the premise of his subjection to ideology. Ideology is an imaginary representation of the real conditions of existence of the subject in the world (*Norton Anthology* 1350–1351). By exposing individuals to this imaginary representation, ISAs assure that the ruling ideology is constantly promoted and reproduced (*Norton Anthology* 1337). As may already be evident, in the Althusserian notion of ISAs, the subject is hailed by ideology as a free individual. Because of the way ideology interpellates individuals by creating imaginary conditions of existence in which subjects recognise themselves (*Norton Anthology* 1332), individuals seem to give their voluntary consent to the organisation of the society they live in. Althusser, by contrast, contends that the subject's "willing" participation in a capitalistic society is the result of the inculcation of dominant values carried out by ISAs.

With regard to the function of the ISA of education, I will show that in the figure of Captain Hook the Peter Pan materials present a model which would be soon completely revised by the new agenda of the British education system. The revision of Captain Hook's Latinate prose will be considered against the backdrop of the bowdlerisation that the children's novel *Peter and Wendy* underwent in order to become a suitable compulsory text in British schools. Additionally, I will analyse Barrie's speech "Captain Hook at Eton" to contend that Captain Hook's instability also derives from the controversial association of boyishness with piracy in the cultural construction of the ideology of British New Imperialism.

The Peter Pan fictions present various traits which clash with what is traditionally expected from children's literature. Because of their disquieting attack on children's expectations, the Peter Pan materials are highly unstable texts for children. Barrie's

deconstruction of the enchantment of fairy tale lore and his depiction of some of the most dreaded experiences in childhood, such as the fear of a separation from the nursery and the consequent loss of parental love, are likely to entail a repulsive response on the part of children. It is not surprising then that only a few children nowadays have read, or still read the book.⁴⁶ Most of them are familiar with the Peter Pan story rather through its film adaptations (Stoddard Holmes 132). For this reason, after having discussed the ISA of education, I will turn to the cultural apparatus to explore the film versions of the Peter Pan story.

The numerous film adaptations of the Peter Pan story indicate a particular interest of the ISA of cultural apparatus in Barrie's hero. In my analysis I will focus on two of the most popular film adaptations, namely Walt Disney's cartoon *Peter Pan* (1953) and Steven Spielberg's film *Hook* (1991).⁴⁷ The reason why I have selected these two film productions is that they belong to the mainstream culture of their time. This provides a firm ground for ideology criticism for which mainstream cultural phenomena, given their broader audience, are a more productive field of research than counterculture productions. Moreover, both films were produced after a period of crisis in the American film industry. Their narrative strategies were thus devised with the purpose of enthralling an audience as large as possible to relaunch the entertainment companies. In my analysis I will show that instead of plainly erasing

46 Amanda Stoddard Homes mentions that in the US neither the State Department of Education nor the lists provided by the American Library Association and the National Endowment for the Humanities include *Peter Pan* in their recommended readings for children any more.

47 Due to constraints posed by the limited scope of this research, my selection does not include other film adaptations which might have required a more extensive research. In particular, I have excluded from my analysis P. J. Hogan's *Peter Pan* (2003) and Marc Foster's *Finding Neverland* (2004). Hogan's film is the only adaptation which has been licensed by the Great Ormond Street Hospital on the grounds that it was faithful to the original while "communicating to an audience with modern sensibilities" (Tatar 334). Similarly, Peter Hollindale's comments on Hogan's *Peter Pan* praise the film for recreating the story for the audience of the time (Hollindale 212). *Finding Neverland*, strictly speaking, is not an adaptation but a biographical account of Barrie's relationship to Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and her sons based upon Allan Knee's play *The Man Who Was Peter Pan* (Tatar 336).

ambiguous passages from the Peter Pan fictions, as education has done, the cultural apparatus seems to deploy a subtler strategy. Considering the film adaptations of the Peter Pan story, I would say that the cultural apparatus draws on the richness of the Peter Pan materials in order to accommodate the distinct cultural climate of the era. Through my analysis I will also investigate why it was the Peter Pan story which was singled out by ISAs and not another play or work by Barrie. Barrie's play *Mary Rose*, for example, with its spooky plot and gothic reminiscences⁴⁸ could have provided, at least on paper, equal inspiration for intriguing adaptations.⁴⁹ Yet the ISAs have resorted to the story of Peter Pan to interpellate subjects throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

4.2 "Captain Hook at Eton"

On 7 July 1927, Barrie delivered a speech to the First Hundred⁵⁰ at Eton which consisted of a story called "Captain Hook at Eton", which was also published in *The Times*. The speech is constructed as a background story to the Peter Pan fictions in which Barrie provides explanations and further details for the character of Captain Hook (Rose 115). Captain Hook is described in the text as an "Old Boy", a former student of the prestigious boys' public-school Eton, founded in 1440 (Hiebert Alton 383). The account traces back Hook's experience at Eton through the evidence of fictive characters, among others Aunt Emily and the pirate's former fellow students. Barrie recounts biographical details such as the fact that Hook was devoted to land-sports, that he joined the exclusive Pop, Eton's social

48 Set on a Scottish island, the protagonist Mary Rose, a young mother, is abducted by the supernatural forces of the land. After many years Mary, who has remained the same age, is allowed to return home and sees her boy Simon as a middle-aged man, and her parents as elderly. Shocked by this vision, Mary runs away. She will continue to haunt her house, remaining youthful, in search of her lost boy. Barrie was inspired by an old Scottish legend he had heard as a child, according to which humans who came in contact with Fairyland returned home years later with no memory of the events that had occurred.

49 Peter Hollindale has indeed identified *Mary Rose* as another version of Peter Pan with inverted gender roles (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 207).

50 The First Hundred are Eton's top students. Students take exams in order to be admitted to the First Hundred, and they are tested each year by examiners from Oxford and Cambridge.

club, and that he ranked among the top scholars of the college. Nonetheless Barrie claims that records of Hook's presence at Eton, including photographs traditionally left behind by students to their tutors, have been mysteriously destroyed. Regarding this mystery he reveals that he has found out that Hook, after having spent his life as a pirate, one night visited his old college to steal documents and erase all evidence of his presence at Eton as a young boy. Indeed, to protect the reputation of the college, Hook was determined to erase his ignominious fame as pirate from the history of the college. The story ends with the account of Hook's death at the hands of a little boy who remains unnamed, but who is clearly Peter Pan. Barrie reports that in his last will Hook left all his possessions to Eton.

"Captain Hook at Eton" is not the first text in which Barrie foregrounds Hook's relationship to the exclusive college and more generally to the sphere of education. Although only suggested and not made explicit as in the speech given at Eton, the connection between Captain Hook and private schools is present in the Peter Pan fictions from the start. Captain Hook has a progenitor in *The Little White Bird* in the figure of Pilkington, the fearful schoolmaster to whom all boys are sent when they reach the age of eight, and who marks the end of joyful playfulness. In the early drafts of the play *Peter Pan*, Hook is still a pedantic headmaster who embodies the constraints of institutional life (Tatar 59). Subsequently, Hook evolves from a headmaster to the pirate with an obsession for good forms that we know from the final version of the play and *Peter and Wendy*. Barrie's allusions to Hook's presence at Eton are best exemplified by the pirate's last words in the play – "Floreat Etona" ("May Eton Flourish"), the official motto of the college.⁵¹ Thus, there is an evolution in the character's depiction. This transformation of Captain Hook from stuffy headmaster to former student of

⁵¹ In the stage directions to the play Barrie wrote: "That not wholly unheroic figure climbs the bulwarks murmuring 'Floreat Etona', and prostrates himself into the water, where the crocodile is waiting for him open-mouthed" (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 146).

Eton was only fully accomplished while Barrie was working on *Peter and Wendy* (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays* 321). Indeed, it is in the children's novel that Captain Hook acquires his manifold nuances as a mixture of an unscrupulous pirate and a good-mannered gentleman committed to the values of upper-class boys. In *Peter and Wendy* Captain Hook becomes a round character, whose contradictions add a further element of instability to the Peter Pan fictions. The first portrait of Captain Hook appears in Chapter 5 of the novel:

In the midst of them, the blackest and largest jewel in that dark setting, reclined James Hook, or as he wrote himself, Jas. Hook, of whom it is said he was the only man that the Sea-Cook feared. He lay at his ease in a riot chariot drawn and propelled by his men, and instead of a right hand he had the iron hook with which ever and anon he encouraged them to increase their pace. As dogs this terrible man treated and addressed them, and as dogs they obeyed him. In person he was cadaverous and blackavized, and his hair was dressed in long curls, which at a little distance looked like black candles, and gave a singularly threatening expression to his handsome countenance. His eyes were of the blue of the forget-me-not, and of a profound melancholy, save when he was plunging his hook into you, at which time two red spots appeared in them and lit them up horribly. In manner, something of the grand seigneur still clung to him, so that he even ripped you up with an air, and I have been told that he was a *raconteur* of repute. He was never more sinister than when he was most polite, which is probably the truest test of breeding; and the elegance of his distinction, even when he was swearing, no less than the distinction of his demeanor, showed him one of a different caste from his crew. A man of indomitable courage, it was said of him that the only thing he shied at was the sight of his own blood, which was thick and of an unusual colour. In dress he

somewhat aped the attire of Charles II, having heard it said in some earlier period of his career that he bore a strange resemblance to the ill-fated Stuarts; and in his mouth he had a holder of his own contrivance which enabled him to smoke two cigars at once. But undoubtedly the grimmest part of him was his own iron claw. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 49–50)

Hook's description is one of the most vivid ones in *Peter and Wendy*, which demonstrates the value that Barrie had assigned to this character in the economy of the novel. As the story evolves, Hook's portrait is enriched by further details:

Hook was not his true name. To reveal who he really was would even at this date set the whole country in a blaze; but as those who read between the lines must already have guessed, he had been at a very famous public school; and its traditions still clung to him like garments, with which indeed they are largely concerned. Thus it was offensive to him even now to board a ship in the same dress in which he grappled her, and he still adhered in his walk to the school's distinguished slouch. But above all he retained the passion for good forms. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 117)

The scenario which Barrie wrote for the screen version of the novel⁵² contains precise indications about the way the pirate had to be interpreted on screen, which may help to illuminate Barrie's complex conception of his character:

(Note—About the playing of this part. Hook should be played absolutely seriously, and the actor must avoid all temptation to play the part as if he was

52 In her cinematic survey of the adaptations of the Peter Pan story Maria Tatar give a brief account of the history of the film adaptations of the Peter Pan fictions. The first film based upon the Peter Pan story was Herbert Brenon's *Peter Pan* (1924), a silent film for which Barrie himself had written a scenario in 1920 which included rich descriptions of each scene. In the end however, Brenon decided to use another script by Willes Goldbeck (Tatar 321).

conscious of its humor. There *is* such a temptation, and in the stage play the actors of the part have sometimes yielded to it, with fatal results. He is a blood-thirsty villain, all the more so because he is an educated man. The other pirates are rough scoundrels, but he can be horribly polite when he is most wicked. He should have manners of a beau. But above all the part should be played with absolute seriousness and avoidance of trying to be funny. (Tatar 288–289, emphasis in text)

The depiction of Hook seems to allow for an ironic portrait of a grown-up upper-class boy turned into a villain. However, a definitive assessment of this controversial figure is complicated considering that his abjection in the novel is always accompanied by references to his impeccable education and cleverness. At times the narrator treats Hook as if he were a legendary and yet controversial historical figure:

To what extent Hook is to blame for his tactics on this occasion is for the historian to decide. Had he waited on the rising ground till the proper hour he and his men would probably have been butchered; and in judging him it is only fair to take this into account. What he should perhaps have done was to acquaint his opponents that he proposed to follow a new method. On the other hand, this, as destroying the element of surprise, would have made his strategy of no avail, so that the whole question is beset with difficulties. One cannot at least withhold a reluctant admiration for the wit that had conceived so bold a scheme, and the fell genius with which it was carried out. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 105)

Young readers of *Peter and Wendy* are likely to be impressed by Hook's fearful abominable conduct, and Barrie's narrator duly merges with their point of view to arouse sentiments of

fear and rejection, as is shown by the following scene where Peter confronts his enemy:

Quick as thought he [Peter] snatched a knife from Hook's belt and was about to drive it home, when he saw that he was higher up to rock than his foe. It would not have been fighting fair. He gave the pirate a hand to help him up.

It was then that Hook bit him.

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

(Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 82)

On the other hand, Barrie rejects a one-dimensional depiction of Hook as evil, insisting conversely on presenting an ambiguous figure who eludes easy simplifications. Rose has underlined the elements of instability in Captain Hook's depiction in the Peter Pan materials, setting them against the backdrop of the changes introduced by the British Government in the educational system at the beginning of the twentieth century. Her perspective allows me to reflect upon the agency of the ISA of education with regard to the Peter Pan story. In 1915, the London County Council's Book and Apparatus Sub-Committee adopted Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* as a reader for teaching in school. On this occasion, all signs of Captain Hook's being well-versed in Latin were erased. According to Rose's analysis, this was a consequence of the Second Education Act of 1902, drafted by British

stateman Arthur James Balfour (1848–1930).⁵³ While school boards in England and Wales were abolished, the Act aimed at reorganising the administration of education at a local level, placing elementary schools under the control of local education authorities, namely the county and county borough councils. Although the Act sought to support, for first time, secondary and technical education targeted at working-class children, it ended up introducing a differentiation between the education of working-class and middle-class children. The former usually only attended elementary school, which stopped at 14. The Act prescribed that elementary school teaching draw upon an unsophisticated, natural language devoid of the abstractness of the literary; additionally, pupils of elementary schools did not have to learn Latin, but only English. Middle-class children, by contrast, attended secondary school, which lasted until 16. They learned Greek and Latin and had to be made familiar with the quality of literary language. Working-class pupils were only expected to reach literacy, whereas middle-class pupils were stimulated to enjoy the sophisticated language of literature. As a result, when the decision to introduce *Peter and Wendy* in elementary schools was made, all episodes referring to Hook as an “Old Boy” were purged from the novel. References to Hook’s Latinate education suffered the same fate. Rose contends that all signs of divisiveness in the narrative, such as the clash between Hook’s Latinate ductus and the style of the other characters and the shifting position of the narrator’s voice – alternatively siding with the adult and the child, as shown above – were to be toned down to re-establish the idea of stability in language. In order to neutralise the novel’s language instability, traces pointing to the instability of a self-conscious narrator were erased in favour of an aseptic third-person narration (Rose 116ff.). Language had to be presented as anonymous and undifferentiated as possible. The paradox of this operation, as Rose correctly points out, was that by doing so a

53 Elementary school education was compulsory in England since 1880.

new constructed language was created, which was actually just as calculated and cultured as the one of Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*.

Rose's account of the transformations that the text underwent helps to illuminate the ideology of education. Still, her analysis remains more elusive when it comes to "Captain Hook at Eton". Rose contends that by writing a story about Hook at Eton and delivering it as a speech at the same college, Barrie exposes the cultural code of what prior to this gesture had remained a pure allusion (116). Rose's argument, however, does not explain the special position assigned to Captain Hook within the Peter Pan fictions. Preoccupied as she is with the urgency to demonstrate the adult's ideologic manipulation of children's texts, in my opinion Rose overlooks the distinctive role of Hook, a role whose distinctiveness is demonstrated by the fact that the pirate is the only character for whom Barrie has created a background story. Why address a speech to the First Hundred with a memento of the villain of his narratives instead of a homage to the hero Peter Pan himself? Why did Barrie decide to construct a background story as an "Old Boy" for the pirate, and not for Peter Pan?

I think that the relevance of Captain Hook in the Peter Pan story can be better understood in relation to Bradley Deane's analysis of the way masculinity was rewritten in the literature of the time as a consequence of the new imperial politics. Although Deane does not include a thorough analysis of Barrie's narrative in his study, I believe that his argument can be productively used for a reflection upon the figure of Hook. In "Captain Hook at Eton", Barrie informs us that Captain Hook has rejected the ethic built upon physical exercise and moral elevation which characterised the public-school education. He has embraced a life which seems to represent the exact opposite of his education at Eton. The unfairness with which he has fought against Peter Pan in *Peter and Wendy* has brought shame upon his moral character and, by extension, to the prestigious college he attended as a boy. However, Deane

maintains that a new rhetoric of imperial play ethic was created and exploited in the late Victorian Era to help sustain the stability of the British Empire. At the turn of the century pirates are redeemed by the New Imperialist imagination, which associates them with boyishness (Deane 89). Pirates are no longer the young hero's foil but his double, and not simply because of the success of pirates in adventure fiction or because playing at pirates was one of the most popular games of the era. Focusing on the relationship between Peter and Hook, I should say that there are numerous connections between the two in the Peter Pan fictions, starting with the fact that Peter himself is named "Captain" in the novel.⁵⁴ Additionally, Hook is the only character in the novel who spends time observing and reflecting on Peter. Wendy may take care of Peter unconditionally – she tries to make up for Peter's emotional lack (of motherhood, of stories, of children) – but it is Hook who engages with him on a par and who seems to understand Peter more perceptively:

He [Captain Hook] stood silent at the foot of the tree looking across the chamber at his enemy. Did no feeling of compassion stir this sombre breast? The man was not wholly evil, he loved flowers (I have been told) and sweet music (he was himself no mean performer on the harpsichord): and, let be frankly admitted, the idyllic nature of the scene shook him profoundly. Mastered by his better self he would have returned reluctantly up the tree but for one thing.

What stayed him was Peter's impertinent appearance as he slept. The open mouth, the drooping arm, the arched knee: they were such a personification of cockiness as, taken together, will never again one may hope be presented to

⁵⁴ "Captain Pan calculated, after consulting the ship's chart, that if this weather lasted, they should strike the Azores about the 21st of June, after which it would save time to fly" (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 134).

eyes so sensitive to their offensiveness. They steeled Hook's heart. If his rage had broken him into a hundred pieces every one of them would have disregarded the incident, and leapt at the sleeper. (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 111)

As the following passage from "Captain Hook at Eton" demonstrates, there are moments where Peter Pan seems to trade sides with Hook. Hook's brutality and amoral conduct are equalled by the heartlessness of young boys as represented by Peter Pan:

Gradually it became known that a little boy – his implacable enemy – had struck Hook from the lists of Man. He had always hated children and the callous little brutes did for him in the end. This infant was the only person of whom James's aunt could not speak with charity. She always maintained that on securing possession of the pirate ship he dressed in her nephew's clothing (cut down to fit him by the disreputable female of his wanderings), and with a hook in his hand and a cigar holder in his mouth strutted the deck using disgraceful language, a painful picture of James's conqueror that which I have an uncomfortable feeling may be true. (Alton 390)⁵⁵

Therefore, I believe that the portrait of Captain Hook in the Peter Pan fictions can be considered as an example of those adventure stories in which pirates are put on a par with boys. This is most significant at a time where the figure of the pirate was called upon to perform a new cultural work in the national self-image, as explained by Deane (91). The behaviour of the pirates was taken to exemplify the very essence of boyhood: both are pre-

⁵⁵ This scene replicates the depiction of Peter Pan after his victorious duel with Captain Hook in the play *Peter Pan*: "The curtain rises to show Peter a very Napoleon on his ship. It must not rise again lest we see him on the poop in Hook's hat and cigars, and with a small iron claw." (Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, 51).

moral, highly imaginative and shrewd. Like pirates, boys are not bound to a moral code but just to the self-imposed internal rules of the play (Deane 95–96). In this context, it is no longer moral consciousness that governs human conduct but shame in front of the rest of the group they are affiliated with. As a matter of fact, even in “Captain Hook at Eton”, the pirate does not repent but simply tries to eschew posthumous disgrace. Viewed under this aspect, Barrie’s narrative choice of transforming Hook into an “Old Boy” substantiates the importance of the relationship between the two types of personalities, those of pirates and adolescent boys. This is most interesting if we consider the fact that some aged Etonians may have aspired to gain a post in the British Empire. It is not by chance that in his redemptive speech about Hook, Barrie turns the pirate’s despicable career into evidence of the recognition of the fact that ultimately, “the Etonian is a natural leader of man” (Alton 391). Britain had been accused of harbouring the title of a “pirate empire” after the Boer War,⁵⁶ yet the idea that the Empire has to pursue moral development progressively held a minority position in the debate around the position of the British Empire (Deane 112). Instead, the political conviction gained favours that in certain circumstances, piracy was justified in the struggle to rule the colonial possessions of the British empire. In the new conception of non-developmental global politics (Deane 86), the main purpose was no longer to civilise colonies but to maintain them (Deane 113). Moral restraint was thus resented as an obstacle to imperialism. From this perspective, Peter Pan’s opposition to moral constraints echoes Captain Hook’s unfairness: the commonalities between the two characters outweigh their antagonism.

The most intriguing outcome of Deane’s analysis for the interpretation of the Peter

56 These had been the accusations by the liberal leader John Morley in a speech delivered in 1899 and by the MP William Joseph Corbet in the Westminster Review. Morley and Corbet deprecated that Britain had violated the international law to wage war against the Boer republics. Indeed, Britain had failed to comply with its own treaties, the Pretoria Convention of 1881 and the London Convention of 1884, both of which affirmed the Boers’ right to rule unconditionally in their nations (Deane 111).

Pan fiction is the acknowledgment that the ethics of New Imperialism seems to be only partially ratified by Barrie. In *Peter and Wendy*, I should say that this ethic is rather countered by the narrator's taking side with the child's point of view against Hook's inconsiderate and unfair conduct in the combat, as I have shown above. In the speech delivered at Eton, Barrie praises the degree of continuity between Hook's education as an "Old Boy" and his subsequent capacity (though a despicable one) for leadership: a remark that may be a tribute to the prestige of Eton college demanded by the particular occasion. At the same time, Barrie also deplores that "such a bright morning had to close in such a cataclysm" and informs the audience that the governors of the college have refused Hook's will to preserve the reputation of the institution. As a result, the tone wavers in the speech, as it partially does in *Peter and Wendy* as well, from a sympathising attitude towards the pirate to a sense of pity for Hook's destiny, although Barrie never indulges in moral preaching.

In conclusion, I believe there are reasons for considering Hook as a problematic figure, which go beyond Rose's argument about the ideology of education regarding the adoption of Barrie's text in British schools. A thorough analysis of the role of Captain Hook is necessary in that it represents a privileged point of view to explore the shifts imposed on the character under the influence of the cultural apparatus. In Disney's cartoon *Peter Pan*, Captain Hook becomes a caricatural figure who sticks to the conventional role of the villain. His obsession with good forms is more of a hilarious way to colour the character than the means to problematise him. As far as Spielberg's *Hook* is concerned, even here the pirate is the antagonist of Peter Pan. The subtle play of trading sides between Hook and Peter and the junction forged between boyishness and piracy are entirely dismissed by the two adaptations. I believe the reason for this choice lies in the fact that the cultural forces that had given shape to Captain Hook's character in the Peter Pan materials have most certainly disappeared from

the cultural and ideologic scenario of the two film productions. Nevertheless, I will show in the next sections that both Disney's and Spielberg's films are very much concerned with the sense of masculinity expressed by the Peter Pan fictions. And yet, as their ideological background was no longer that of the British New Imperialism, the sense of fractured male identity had to be "hailed" necessarily by touching upon different, new sentiments.

4.3 Adaptation Theory

The idea that film adaptations are cultural objects of their own that have to be analysed for their value independently, even though the source texts they adapt from may appear self-evident today. However, resistance to this conception has not entirely disappeared. The hostility to a reflection upon film adaptations as cultural objects *per se*, according to Lawrence Venuti, is grounded in the lack of a sufficiently elaborated critical methodology for a thorough analysis of film adaptations (90–91). Venuti maintains that the two main models of critical practice in film adaptation studies are the communicative and the hermeneutic models. The communicative model is based on the romantic assumption that there is an authoritative original text that the adaptation has to interpret. This model implicitly assigns a higher value to the literary text, conceived as source text, of which, film adaptations are considered to be second-order elaborations. Viewed under this aspect, the film version is evaluated according to its level of fidelity to the source text. The main flaw of this communicative model, according to Venuti, is that film adaptations tend to be judged on the basis of the dominant interpretation of the literary text, omitting systematic references to the source text as such (91). The second approach to the study of film adaptations is represented by the hermeneutic model, which considers film adaptation as a form of intertextuality. Here, the adaptation is considered as an autonomous interpretation of the prior materials. This critical practice aims at demonstrating that each adaptation is the outcome of the specific

historical and sociological moment from which it arises. In particular, this model underlines how film adaptations are informed by ideology. According to Venuti, however, the logic of the hermeneutic model is warped from the start by the fact that it considers the ideologic standpoint of the film as if it was immediately available. Against this view, Venuti argues that the critic who applies the hermeneutic model inevitably refers to a source text that has already been mediated by ideology criticism (91). This fallacy ends up damaging the political critique the hermeneutic model would like to bring up. For these reasons, both theoretical approaches, according to Venuti, are unsatisfactory. The communicative model only searches for the univocal meaning in the source text to see whether it has been accurately represented in the adaptation, neglecting the features of the film version; the hermeneutic model shifts its focus to the beliefs that have informed the adaptation while omitting a thorough appreciation of the source text (Venuti 92).

To avoid both blind alleys, Venuti draws upon his main field of research, translation studies, showing that film adaptations work in a way similar to translations. Both interpretative forces, in fact, have to decontextualise the prior materials from their internal linguistic patterns (intratextual relations), from their network with other texts of the category they belong to (intertextual relations), and from the reception of the text in the original culture (context of reception). At the same time, translations and film adaptations alike have to recontextualise the source text in a new network of intratextual, intertextual and receiving context. These processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation are guided, in Venuti's view, by the application of interpretants (94).⁵⁷ Interpretants allow the filmmaker to

⁵⁷ Venuti defines the interpretants as a third term in the competing discourses represented by the source materials on one hand and the adaptation on the other. They are the principles that govern the interpretive moves of the translator. For this reason, they are rooted primarily in the receiving context, although elements of the source text may have also been integrated into them. As such, they represent an essential category to understand the hermeneutic circle, which establishes itself between the source language and its translation in the receiving cultural context (Venuti 94).

choose and select among the prior materials for transforming them into the film adaptation. They can be either formal (choice of genre, formal feature, style of the film-maker etc.) or thematic (codes and ideology) (Venuti 95). The introduction of interpretants avoids the pitfalls of the communicative and intertextuality models. While the communicative and intertextuality models end up concentrating on the interpretation of the source text, interpretants focus on the actual operations performed by the film – what Venuti defines as “the shifts” that have occurred in the adaptation process. Most importantly, he argues that the action of singling out specific interpretants is crucial to the work of the critic as well. Depending on the critic’s methodology, indeed, different interpretants will be singled out (Venuti 96). Moreover, a rigorous analysis of film adaptation requires the critic to accomplish at least two tasks: first, the interpretants adopted by the film-maker should not be hastily disavowed. Historical contingencies will have to be considered to avoid hasty judgements; and, second, the critic has to bear in mind that the interpretants applied by the film may be either complementary or disjunctive. In other words, they may reinforce each other, but they may also raise different interpretations, according to the nature of the audience (Venuti 97).

In his thorough exposition of the fruitful application of translation theory to the study of film adaptation, Venuti pleads for a new hermeneutic relation between source text and adaptation that would serve two purposes: first, the hermeneutic interpretation should highlight to what extent the adaptation represents a backlash to the source text. Ideally, interpretation should seek to foreground how the adaptation ultimately interrogates the source text; and, second, the critic’s stance should also remain under constant interrogation, transforming criticism into constant self-criticism (Venuti 102). In the next section I will use ideology criticism as the main interpretant to expose the cultural context of two among the most famous film adaptations of the Peter Pan story. Despite the challenges posed by Venuti’s suggestive adaptation theory, his contribution to film adaptation studies will be used as an

inspiring source throughout my analysis of Walt Disney's *Peter Pan* and Steven Spielberg's *Hook*.

4.3.1 Walt Disney's *Peter Pan*

Commentaries on the film adaptations of the Peter Pan materials regularly report that Barrie was convinced in the greater potentiality of films to convey the spirit of the Peter Pan story as compared to stage versions.⁵⁸ Apparently, he was very much disappointed by the film *Peter Pan*, the silent film version by Herbert Brenon produced by the Paramount Studios in 1924 which, according to him, totally lacked creativity and simply reproduced the stage version (Ohmer 151). Walt Disney thought that a cartoon film based on Peter Pan could avoid the flaws of Brenon's silent film, thanks to the greater potential of animated films. Inspired by his firm belief that Barrie's play was a perfect vehicle for cartooning (Ohmer 151),⁵⁹ he started negotiating with the Great Ormond Street Hospital in 1935 and reached an agreement in 1939 (Tatar 326). The release was delayed for several reasons linked to the economic and aesthetic crisis of the Disney Studios, which had started in the late 30s. Besides, with the outbreak of WWII, the market cartoon had declined – a factor that increased the company's sense of insecurity. In 1953, *Peter Pan* was finally released, and it was a hit.

Susan Ohmer has described the Disney film as a reworking of the main issues at stake in the Peter Pan narratives. These issues, according to Ohmer, are the status of fantasy in the experience of human beings, children's privileged access to imagination, mothers as privileged mediators between fantasy and reality and issues raised by gender and sexuality (154). Ohmer maintains that Disney's *Peter Pan* has filtered all these elements through the

58 "The film can do things for Peter Pan which the ordinary stage cannot do." (Ohmer 151; Tatar 231).

59 In Walt Disney's words: "In fact, one might think that Barrie wrote the play with cartoons in mind. I don't think he was ever happy with the stage version. Live actors are limited, but with cartoons, we can give free rein to imagination." (Ohmer 151).

studio culture of the time and the climate of the post-war US culture (154), although she does not specify what exactly this cultural climate entails. I agree with Ohmer that the role played by the imagination in children and adults is one of the main themes of the Disney film. But, the boundaries between the world of imagination, in which children live, and the world of everyday life, which pertains to adults, are never crossed in the cartoon. Ohmer contends: “In Disney’s film, the parents remain resolutely adult and do not cross over into childish fantasies.” (168). The film begins with a depiction of two brothers, John and Michael, playing games based on imaginary characters, inspired by the stories told by their elder sister, Wendy. It is Wendy indeed who tells adventure stories to John and Michael, not their mother. Far from being financially depressed, in Disney’s film, the Darlings live in an upper-middle class neighbourhood in Bloomsbury – one of the most exclusive parts of London (Ohmer 168). While the children are playing, Mr. and Mrs. Darling prepare for an evening outing. Especially for Mr. Darling in the film, an authoritarian father constantly vexed by the exuberance of his offspring, his children are represented rather as a nuisance to his dressing up. These first sequences of the film contrast with the opening of *Peter and Wendy*, where the nursery is equally shared by the worlds of adult life and childhood: the outset of Barrie’s novel depicts Wendy while playing with her mother, Mrs. Darling. Moreover, in *Peter and Wendy*, it is Mrs. Darling who rolls up Peter’s shadow and puts it in the drawer.⁶⁰ In Disney’s films, by contrast, Mrs. Darling listens to Wendy murmuring about Peter’s shadow with a condescending face while leaving home, but she actually does not believe her (Ohmer 168).

60 Although Mrs. Darling does not remember exactly who Peter Pan is, listening to her children’s stories reminiscences her childhood and progressively seems to retrieve her belief in Peter: “Occasionally, in her travels through her children’s minds, Mrs. Darling found things she could not understand, and of these quite the most perplexing was the word Peter. She knew of no Peter, and yet he was here and there in John and Michael’s minds, while Wendy’s began to be scrawled all over with him. [...] At first Mrs. Darling did not know, but after thinking back into her childhood she just remembered a Peter Pan who was said to live with the fairies. There were odd stories about him, as that when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened. She had believed in him at the time, but now that she was married and full of sense she quite doubted whether there was any such person.” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 10).

In the film, Mrs. Darling thus sides much more with her husband than her children. For this reason, I do not agree with Ohmer's interpretation that mothers are privileged mediators between fantasy and reality in the Disney film. As Mr. Darling thinks that Wendy's stories have a bad influence on the younger boys, he prevents her from indulging in her story-telling. "She is a young woman already," Mr. Darling states, "and she has to behave accordingly, starting by sleeping in another separate room apart from her male brothers." As Ohmer observes, "Disney's father is resolutely grown up and wants everyone else to grow up too" (169). In the Peter Pan materials, there is either a bonding or a crossing of borders between adulthood and childhood; but, in Disney's *Peter Pan*, a line is drawn between adults and children from the very beginning, and Mrs. Darling does not do much to fill this gap.

Regarding the depiction of Peter Pan, he is rather shown as a young teenager than a child in the film. This has consequences for the dynamic between him and the female figures who encounter him. Despite of portraying aloofness from sentimental relationship in the film, Peter Pan is an object of attraction for Wendy, Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily who at different points, and according to their personality, seem to be allured by his acts of bravado and audaciousness. There is evidence indeed that one of the main concerns of the screenwriters was to neutralise the impression of Peter as a "sissy" in the film (Ohmer 174). Records of the meetings at the Walt Disney Studios have shown that the preoccupation with the necessity to give Peter a more defined sexual orientation was felt as a priority.⁶¹ Consequently, sexual ambiguity was erased by the film. In particular, male characters seemed to share clear views on what is supposed to be a woman's intrinsic nature. Wendy's access into adulthood is

⁶¹ Ohmer writes: "In a November 1938, memo discussing James Barrie's novel, story analyst Dorothy Blank urged that, 'we remove any doubts about sex, and make our hero all boy – fun, fierce, brave and a little tough.' In 1946, Walt Disney told Hedda Hopper that he found the character of Peter 'too sugary' for modern tastes and planned on 'toughening him a bit, making him a real boy'." (173–174).

marked by her father's performative speech act, when he claims that she is now almost a woman, implying that nothing will be the same from that moment onwards. Captain Hook on his part relies on his theories about the jealousy of women to weave his schemes against Peter Pan. As a result, I should say that there is no hint in Disney's film version of sexual ambiguity; but, more strikingly, comments over definite sexual identities are always the outcome of male characters' speculations on women.

The final scene of Disney's film is worth special attention, as it has been replicated by Spielberg in *Hook*. The ending of the cartoon film actually resumes the narration of the opening scene. The opening and ending scenes of the film thus represents a frame where the story of Peter Pan and the Darling family evolves. At the beginning, an outbound narrator claims that this story will repeat itself forever over time because it is the never-ending story of children growing up: "All of this has happened before, and it will all happen again." This cyclical vision of time in the film reproduces Barrie's "Afterthought" to the original version of the play. However, with regard to the "Afterthought", I have demonstrated that the cyclic return of Peter Pan also constitutes a perpetuation of suffering on the part of adults who are condemned to experience continuously a sense of loss about the end of childhood. This bleak view is entirely erased by Disney's film, which at the end shows the reunited Darling family after the return of Wendy, John and Michael back home, looking as if enraptured out of their open window. The children remember what recently ended: their adventure with Peter Pan. Adults have the opportunity to re-experience for a while that blissful moment of enchantment triggered by the stories they had heard or read as children. Once again, Mr. Darling steals the show, as it is him in the end who decrees the beneficial influence of Peter Pan on the whole family.

Finally, the unproblematised version of Disney is exemplified by the removal of one

of the pivotal scenes of the novel and the play: the famous episode in which Tinker Bell is saved by the audience's clapping as a sign of the enduring belief in fairies. In this scene, Tinker Bell almost died after drinking the poisonous beverage destined by Captain Hook to kill Peter. Only the audience's belief in the power of imagination can save her. Clapping their hands, the public confirms that they have not lost the power to believe, and that a fairy, and more generally the world of imagination, is still important to them. It is thus astonishing that a film adaptation produced in a studio that is considered to be a repository of contemporary fantasy for adults and children should have taken the decision to dismiss this scene. In my opinion, the original scene by Barrie advocates a conception of imagination as a performative act that probably went beyond the Disney Studios' notion of fantasy. I believe that the Disney film testifies to a tradition that sees imagination as an artfully conceived blissful story, which has to be presented to the audience without inquiring what its response might be. Barrie's narrative takes more risks and clearly exposes its instability when the narrator hints at the fact that some children actually hiss, implying that Tinker Bell may also have died. This is an option that the cultural apparatus has to elide if its purpose is to stick to the idea that there is a barrier between childhood and adulthood, between imagination and reality. In Disney's conception of the story, children always believe in fairies – adults never do. But, on certain occasions, they may temporarily do so. As the influential critic of *The New York Times*, Bosley Crowther observed: "Perhaps these eliminations were prompted by a belief that present-day adults and children are more literal than they were in Barrie's time. [...] And, it may also be that Mr. Disney and his artists, for all their craft and skill, are still a wee bit unresponsive where the delicacies of whimsy are concerned." (Ohmer 178). Drawing upon Venuti's terminology, I believe that the film viewed under this aspect is partially disjunctive. Indeed, Disney's Peter Pan derives much of its charms from the representation of the role of

fantasy in the human experience. Still, this experience necessarily has to be limited to a specific age or, as far as adults are concerned, to a short span of time; for example, the time needed for the experience of viewing a cartoon at the cinema. As I will show in the next section, Spielberg in *Hook* decides to include the episode of Tinker Bell's death and the belief in fairies in his film that was released in 1992. But, at this point, the individuals he is appealing to have internalised a distinct notion of the divide between children and adult.

4.3.2 Steven Spielberg's *Hook*

Steven Spielberg's *Hook*, with its \$60 million-plus budget, was from the start conceived to represent one of the big events of the season. The film was expected to boost the American film-industry after a period of economic crisis and launch Sony Pictures in the Hollywood world. The film production could also rely for its success on Spielberg's status in the Hollywood star system at the time of the film release.⁶² *Hook* was expected to gain the same world acclaim as the director's previous films, with which it seemed to share a continuity of intents.⁶³ Apparently, rumours had been circulating for years in Hollywood about Spielberg being the ideal director for an adaptation of Barrie's story for the big screen, given his ability "to tell children's stories that appeal to young and old alike" (de Vries). Spielberg's claims about the hero of the Peter Pan story seem to substantiate this view. While working on the film, the director expressed his enthusiasm about the idea of filming the story of the evolution of his main protagonist into a "wonderful man-child" (de Vries). When prompted to consider Barrie's narratives in which Peter Pan was not exactly a traditional hero, Spielberg bluntly replied: "That's Barrie's idea. I think we go in the other direction" (de Vries). In fact, Spielberg's *Hook* has reshaped the Peter Pan story significantly to suit the

62 When *Hook* was released, Spielberg had already directed Hollywood hits such as *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and the *Indiana Jones* series starring Harrison Ford.

63 Patricia Pace observes that similar to *E.T.* and *Close Encounters of the Third Type*, Spielberg confronts himself again with the theme of a child searching for his parents in *Hook* (Pace 114).

expectations of the audience of the 90s.

Hook tells the story of the astonishing evolution of Peter Banning, a middle-aged American lawyer who neglects his family to attend his business in corporate raiding. Although he does not remember anything about his childhood, very soon in the film we get to know that Peter is an orphan. He grew up with Granny Wendy, a benefactor who lives in London with two old orphans and who has been taking care of orphans throughout her life. When Peter was a young boy Granny Wendy managed to find parents for Peter: the American couple who finally adopted him and brought him to the US. At Christmas, Peter travels to London with his family— his wife Moira who is Granny Wendy's granddaughter and their two kids Jack and Maggie – to spend their Christmas holidays at Granny Wendy's house. This is also the occasion to celebrate the opening of a wing of the new orphan children's hospital in London, which is going to be dedicated to Granny Wendy. At the party organised to celebrate the event, Peter makes a moving speech, in the presence of Granny Wendy, in front of the audience comprising former orphans who have been helped by Wendy. Upon their return home, the Banning family discovers that Jack and Maggie have been kidnapped by the pirate Captain Hook who has left behind a provocative, yet formally impeccable message, inviting Peter to visit him in Neverland and fight him if he wants his children back. Peter thus returns to Neverland to rescue Jack and Maggie. However, he has lost the capacity to fly and fight. Moreover, the Lost Boys, a band of young orphaned children that inhabit Neverland and used to be his friends, do not recognise him as their former fellow. Peter has to be trained again by the Lost Boys' leader Rufio, under the supervision of Tinker Bell, the tiny fairy played by Julia Roberts. Although Rufio disavows Peter's leadership at the beginning, he has to give up his resistance in the end convinced by the fact that the majority of the Lost Boys progressively recognise their old companion Peter in the older and overweight Peter Banning.

Meanwhile, Hook (played by Dustin Hoffman) tries to entice Peter's two children by convincing them that their parents actually never loved them. Maggie rejects Hook's insinuations, whereas Jack, who still bears a grudge against his father for not having been present at the decisive end-of-the-year baseball match, is taken in by Hook's lies about his parents. When Peter realises that Hook is subtly trying to steal the love of his children successfully, he feels dispirited. During his stay in Neverland, in a crucial scene with Tinker Bell, Peter finds Wendy's abandoned house. There, he progressively remembers the earlier stages of his life. He remembers being a baby who had fallen from the perambulator while his mother was making projects for his future life, and how Tinker Bell came to rescue him and brought him to Neverland. Most significantly, he remembers how much he missed his mother as a young boy in Neverland. He recalls that one day he decided to fly home to his parents, but the window of the nursery was barred; and he saw from the outside that they had a new baby and had completely forgotten him. After that, he remembers having looked for open windows and entering Wendy's house (the future Granny Wendy), the only one whose windows were left open. Wendy was a young girl at that point. Peter kept on visiting her each spring but, while he remained young like all the creatures in Neverland, Wendy grew up. One day, Peter found Wendy, much older, with her granddaughter Moira sleeping in her bed. Peter fell in love with Moira, which determined his decision not to go back to Neverland. He remained with Wendy and Moira and started growing up. Remembering all these past events, Peter becomes sad. But in Wendy's house, Peter also acknowledges that his greatest desire since the first encounter with Moira has always been that of becoming a father, and he remembers the day his first son Jack was born. At this point, he begins having happy thoughts again. All of a sudden, he regains his ancient powers –the ability to fly among others. Peter feels he is strong enough to rescue his children. In the decisive confrontation between him and Hook, the pirate is extremely unfair despite his obsession with good forms. During the

last duel, Captain Hook falls into the jaws of a huge crocodile and dies. Young Rufio loses his life in this battle to help Peter. He dies expressing his wish of having a father like Peter. At the end of the film, Peter parts with the Lost Boys to return home with his own kids. The family reunites in the nursery of Granny Wendy's house in London. Peter learns how to be a more attentive father and husband: he becomes a more laudable individual.

The film has been described in the press as a New Age Peter Pan for the 90s (*New York Times*): a claim which is, in my opinion, a good starting point for the analysis of the film. As Patricia Pace observes, the story of Peter Banning shows that contemporary society prescribes men to be hyper competitive in the public sphere for guaranteeing their family's financial security. This ultimately alienates men from their nurturing role as fathers in the family, making them psychologically and physically weak. To counteract this perverse scheme, the film's narrative envisages for Peter a prospect of redemption which, according to Pace, resonates with the creed of the self-help industry (114). Peter Banning's journey back to Neverland is determined by the need to rescue his children; still, it also represents the opportunity for Peter to retrieve the forgotten child in himself. Imagination is the force that allows alienated individuals like Peter Banning to break through. When growing up, adults progressively lose this magical power distracted by their work and new responsibilities. By doing so, not only do they lose contact with their children but they also become less emphatic with other people. They also become weaker themselves, as it is imagination that gives human beings the strength to face challenges. Pressed by the false urgencies of a culture based on performance instead of good sentiments and generous commitment to others, individuals in the Western world become devoid of the deepest values of the human being.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ In particular, the film points at the American way of life, a fact which is demonstrated by the ideal settings of London. London is charming, magical, and the aura of Granny Wendy pervades the whole house. Moira exclaims upon their arrival that she can feel the magic in the house.

But, if they are determined to change, they can regain their imaginary unity by reacquiring the capacity of remembering what is really important in life.

The film upgrades the Peter Pan story, introducing a significant deviation from the original plot. In Barrie's narratives, Neverland is the locale of timelessness and lack of memory. Peter, as shown in Chapter 2, constantly forgets everything, even that he has to return to Wendy's house every year at spring time. In the film, contrastingly, Peter Banning discovers in Neverland that he can precisely retrieve the memory of his life prior to his adoption, when he finds the rest of Wendy's house with Tinker Bell. Therefore, in *Hook*, Neverland is not simply the fantastic world where make-believe comes true: it also becomes the site for a quest of retrieving self-awareness. The journey to Neverland serves the purpose of making Peter Banning a better father capable of carrying out all the tasks that are expected of him by an ideal family of the early 90s, and not like Peter Pan in Barrie's Neverland, which lets him indulge in a never-ending state free from responsibilities. If the main reason for Peter Pan's refusal to leave Neverland in Barrie's narratives is the rejection of an adult working life, this is a wish that the lawyer Peter Banning cannot indulge in according to the ideological frame of the film. A proper child-rearing demands in the film that adults take care morally, emotionally and financially of their children. Peter Banning at the beginning of the film only focuses on the latter, neglecting the former. At the end, he has learnt how to harmoniously merge the two in the form of that balanced life that is so much praised by New Age subculture.

Self-help industry and New Age thinking equally address all genders, as the clash between individualism on one hand and empathy and emotionality on the other may be resented by every individual in the contemporary society. Most certainly, the majority of parents in the early 90s were likely to recognise themselves in the workaholic high flyer Peter

Banning. And yet, the film seems to posit that men have a special propensity to forget the predicament of a life in balance. Dustin Hoffman commented on the film: “Hook is about killing off a part of yourself when you grow up. God knows, I’m not a feminist, but I do think women understand the idea more than men. As a rule, women can sit on the ground with the kids and just get lost for hours; and for men, it’s work. The child is still alive in the female more than in the man.” However debatable the claim that women are endowed with a special propensity to stay instinctively in tune with the child may be, I should say that Mr. Hofmann’s statement is relevant, as it draws the attention to the importance of casting allocation in the film. Although those not familiar with the Peter Pan fictions may overlook it, Spielberg’s choice to make the original roles of Mr. Darling and Peter Pan converge in the film has relevant consequences for the narrative. The character of Peter Banning is extremely important for understanding the logic that underscores the narrative. Peter Banning is a successful lawyer and, yet, he is a failing educator at the beginning of the film. He is as elusive as Peter Pan as a father. Viewed under this aspect, the film seems to stick to a conventional separateness between fathers at work and mothers performing child rearing. Merging Peter with Mr. Darling, in my view the film leads its audience to think that fathers are prone to being elusive. And, yet, Peter claims that he has always wanted to be a father when he regains memories of his past; additionally, he is shown radiantly smiling at the birth of his son Jack, similar to the way mothers are conventionally pictured after having given birth to a baby. *Hook’s* narrative thus aims at debunking the idea that parenting is a motherly affair. Peter Banning’s emotional response to fatherhood indeed puts him on a par with mothers and emphasises the value of parenthood as a whole. As a result, the film is disjunctive, as Peter Banning has to remember that he was a Peter to save his children, but he ultimately has to reject the Peter Pan in him to become an accomplished father, reversing the

childish image of Mr. Darling in the Peter Pan fictions.

Coming back to the treatment of personal liberation as a part of New Age philosophy in *Hook*, it is worth observing the insistence on scenes depicting characters being barred from the nursery windows, an element which differentiates Spielberg's film from Disney's film. This happens to Peter when he visits his mother as a young boy and discovers she has a new baby. In this case Spielberg's film refers to an episode first recounted in *The Little White Bird* and, later, in *Peter and Wendy*. The same scene repeats itself when Peter decides to stay with Wendy because he loves Moira: in this episode it is Tinker Bell who is barred out from the window. And, even in the happy ending, Peter Pan/Peter Banning finds the window closed when he returns back home in London, although this time he will be let in. The contrasting opened-closed windows is not only a recurrent image that reproduces the story of *The Little White Bird* and *Peter and Wendy*. It is also a reflection of the opposing child-adult nature in the film. Keeping the windows closed stands for emotional closure, whereas opening windows shows that people are willing to embrace new adventures as a consequence of the encounter with the lost child in oneself. Children are willing to explore and keep the windows open to fly; whereas, adults like Peter Banning are terrified by the idea of the windows opening in the airplane, as shown in Granny Wendy's home. A second couple of opposites introduced by the film is the opposition between the "culture of death" and "culture of love and life". Captain Hook is depicted by Spielberg as a disturbed personality with suicidal thoughts. Expanding on the melancholic portrait in *Peter and Wendy*, Captain Hook is not just a caricature of the villain in the film: he represents what I have defined as the "culture of death." He wants to enforce hatred and death, and his strategy is based upon convincing that there is no possible love between children and parents – he depicts parents as careless and selfish. By contrast, the two most emotionally charged figures of the film, Peter and Granny Wendy, both stand for love and generosity – they represent "the culture of life." Wendy loves

instinctively, whereas Peter has to learn doing it throughout the film. Although it is only Peter who Hook invites to fight, it can be said that in the film, the pirate is as much Wendy's as Peter's antagonist. This is another the emotional twist of the film that allows for identification in a broader public. If it were just a matter of good parenting, the impact would have been more restricted; but, addressing values such as openness, generosity, transformation, self-awareness, self-empowerment in the film is actually studied to strike a chord in a wider audience.

The last element I would like to address is the use made of Barrie's "Afterthought" by Spielberg. In the film, the latter is anticipated to the moment when Peter remembers his early life in Wendy's house in Neverland. As already shown, this is a pivotal moment in the film as it allows Peter to finally have happy thoughts. In Barrie's novel, this closure is much more ambiguous, as it seems that Peter's longing for the nursery and Wendy's deception are perpetuated by Wendy's choice of letting him come back each spring. In the film, contrastingly, the fact that Wendy grows up and finally gets old represents the opportunity for Peter to meet his future wife Moira. Although Granny Wendy is worried about seeing her destiny replicated in her granddaughter, she finally gives her consent to Peter for staying when she sees that he is really in love with Moira. This choice on the part of the film maker is crucial for the happy ending of the story because it puts an end to the cyclical nature of Peter's repeated returns to the nursery. Transforming "Afterthought" into the decisive moment where Peter chooses to grow up neutralises the elusive nature of the ending of *Peter and Wendy*, in which circular repetition inevitably meant a never-ending recognition of the tragic gap between Peter and the adult world.

Carole Anita Tarr argues that in the Peter Pan Fiction's there is only a thin veil between adults and childhood. Indeed, the Peter Pan fictions stage a constant shifting

between the two: borders between adulthood and childhood are constantly crossed. In *Hook*, by contrast, the thin veil is turned into a “curtain hiding the truth” which has to be revealed finally (Tarr 70–71). The film ends with a picture of the reunited Banning family watching outside the window and Peter claiming, “To live would be an awfully big adventure”, thus reversing Peter Pan’s famous statement in *Peter and Wendy*, “To die would be an awfully big adventure” (Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* 84). Peter Banning at the end of the film is ready to accept life’s big adventure. While Barrie’s Peter Pan fictions are a regression story, they can become a redemption story at the hands of Spielberg. In the Peter Pan materials, imagination is seen as an escape from adult life. In Spielberg’s film, happy thoughts and the capacity to believe are the path to self-improvement. The film ultimately foregrounds an ambitious moralistic message that is totally absent from Barrie’s narratives, conveying the message that if individuals discover the child in them, then the world will become a better place. Although, it is only the workaholic Peter Banning who has to find his true self in the film, the story embraces this as a wishful thinking for all human beings. The last scene of the film, modelled upon the closure of the Disney film, envisages precisely this expansion by zooming off from the happy family to the skyline of London. The scene embodies what Pace defines the film’s narrative of transcendence, which binds private lives with the meaning of the cosmos (114). It is not just because of the aggressive marketing strategies of the Hollywood film industry that *Hook* is likely to supplant Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* in popular imagination. Even if only a tiny portion of the targeted audience may recognise (socially and culturally) themselves in the Banning family, as depicted in *Hook*, the film can appeal to a greater audience, hailing those numerous individuals who flirt with the idea that becoming more laudable individuals is possible through the search for true self. I should agree with Pace’s graphic comment upon the film that this a quest for private identity that ultimately supplants human duty and public participation: “Spielberg encourages us all to remain (blissfully) children, looking back to a

Neverland that never was, safe in the stronghold of the patriarchal family” (119).

4.4 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have analysed the strategies used by the ISA of education and the ISA of the cultural apparatus to turn the Peter Pan story into a cultural icon. At the beginning of the century, the text of *Peter and Wendy* was amended for the reader’s version, which was presented in Britain to elementary school pupils as compulsory part of their curriculum. The text was bowdlerised to neutralise Captain Hook’s convoluted phraseology and Latinate references. By doing so, the instability of language that characterised the literariness of Barrie’s source text was erased to obtain a neutral text, which was considered to be more suitable for pupils who should be taught the minimum level of literacy required by their future working life. It is worth asking whether in such cases, ideology interpellates individuals as free subjects as Althusser posits. In fact, I believe that the ISA of education operates through regulating, legal measures (on this specific occasion grounded in the 1902 Second Education Act), which leave no much room for resistance. In my view, the ISA of education has to enforce its ideology by means of coercion (in this case imposing a text as compulsory reading) to be felicitous, as Barrie’s example shows. As a consequence, the ideology of education does not necessarily require from individuals the recognition of being hailed: it does not offer an illusionary image to individuals in which they can recognise themselves, as posited by Althusser. From this point of view, the ISA of education seems to have unlimited, coercive power on individuals. However, the strategy adopted by education may also represent a limit to the effectiveness of its agency. Ideology imposed by the ISA of education is bound to the contingent political agenda and does not necessarily sediment in the audience’s consciousness. The ISA of education does not always hail the subject as free individuals and, for this reason, the subjection to it remains a formal consent, which does not

advocate the sense of illusory unity with the external world that ideology tries to foster in individuals. The illusory unity of this sense of self-sufficiency can be better explained looking at the way the ISA of the cultural apparatus has exploited the Peter Pan fictions.

The Disney film *Peter Pan* and Spielberg's *Hook* have domesticated the original instability of the Peter Pan fictions. In particular, they have erased the constant crossing of borders from position of a child to an adult, typical of Barrie's narratives. At the same time however, the two films have also exploited the instability of the Peter Pan fictions to recreate an alternative, competitive and captivating image of the conditions of existence. I have contended that Disney's film *Peter Pan* draws a barrier between childhood and adulthood, whereas *Hook* suggests that adults have to retrieve their inner child but only to become more compassionate adult individuals – more responsible fathers, specifically. In the closing scenes of both adaptations, the value of the patriarchal family is celebrated: in both the endings, the fathers are depicted as guides who back their reunited family. This striking convergence of the two adaptations has given me the opportunity to question the source text again. Not only do the two films neutralise uncomfortable elements of instability in the Peter Pan fictions but also they represent a response to the rejection of male adult life, as displayed by Barrie in the Peter Pan story. Viewed under this aspect, Barrie's desire to capture the child in fiction, spurred by the awareness that childhood cannot last forever, is not just the outcome of the anti-didactic tendencies of the Peter Pan fictions explored in the previous Chapters. More precisely, this desire seems to be derived from a troubled conception of manhood, which challenges paternal and paternalistic forms of authority. Peter Pan and Captain Hook, indeed, equally represent an attack to more conventional ideas of masculinity. Peter does it by rejecting an active life in the public space, whereas Captain Hook's attack portrays his unfairness, breaking the rules of homosocial bounding. The film adaptations re-interrogate Barrie's texts, thereby unveiling the original desire of the Peter Pan fictions to capture the

child's boyishness, which is felt as endangered. These concerns are best expressed in the Peter Pan fictions in Barrie's dedication, "To the Five" and in "Captain Hook at Eton", both conceived as texts with male addressees, and that, although touching upon different values, equally depict male adulthood as a form of corruption. *Peter Pan* and *Hook* alike deal with this feeling of rejection of imposed models of manhood and try to tame it. In particular, in their attempt to neutralise the ambiguity of the source text, they share a preoccupation with what is perceived as a threatened masculinity in the Peter Pan fictions. The Disney film responds to this element of instability by means of two strategies. On one hand, Peter Pan is definitely turned into a much more sexualised figure. On the other hand, Mr. Darling is transformed into a dominant fatherly figure who is capable of imposing his views on the rest of the family. Spielberg's *Hook* counteracts weakened manhood more subtly, merging the experience of fatherhood with the issue of the search for one own's identity.⁶⁵ In both cases, the two films cannot avoid drawing upon self-contradictory and disjunctive interpretants. Still, they achieve a captivating image of unity. Disney's *Peter Pan* blends its ideological stance with the charm of fantasy, exploiting the potentiality of cartoons; similarly, *Hook* envisages a self-help fantasy that can potentially flatter all individuals.

Should we then conclude from the analysis of these film adaptations that the Peter Pan fictions were ultimately tales of troubled masculinity written by a male writer who had turned his personal uncertain manhood into a whimsical fantasy of rejection of stable male identity? For sure, I believe that it is the specific deployment of fantasy made by Barrie in the Peter Pan fictions that has been resented by later adaptations as an uncomfortable questioning of

65 Spielberg commented on Peter Banning: "He is a workaholic like lot of us – I can relate to that – but he evolves into this wonderful man-child." And, with regard to his relationship with the Peter Pan story, his overarching comment was: "I guess I had to get a little older to see that I wasn't done regressing. I've given up trying to be Martin Scorsese, Kurosawa or David Lean. Maybe this film is about my finally growing up. I guess I've given up avoiding me." (de Vries).

authority.⁶⁶ This specific trait of the Peter Pan materials, in my opinion, has triggered the urgency of an adequate, “providential” taming of the potentially subversive and disquieting world of Neverland. From the film adaptations examined in this chapter, which are so preoccupied about erasing any trace of unstable masculinity, I would say that authority, in the ideological frame of the ISA of the cultural apparatus, still has a gender.

66 By contrast, in another work by Barrie, the already mentioned play *Mary Rose*, the fantastic world represents the opportunity to tackle with the tragic elements of life instead of questioning authority, thus departing from the main concerns of the Peter Pan fictions. The comment of the contemporary critic Ralf Block is illuminating about the position of the play *Mary Rose* in the broader context of Barrie’s production: “This is by all odds the least wistful and most dramatically powerful of the Barrie plays. Not any of the Barrie dramatic machinery is absent – there is a girl who does not grow up and a Never-Never Land to which she flees, as well as a home that has forgotten her when she returns. But all of it has achieved so complete a transvaluation into serious human values that what has been merely sentimental and regretful and pathetic in Barrie before becomes meaningful and tragic. The dreamer of the theater has finally made a comment on the quality of living which is not easily forgotten. [...] It blends the fantastic and the real inextricably. But for once Barrie has made an actual impact between two powerful motives – death and life. He does not shrink from the issue, and the result is real tragedy (*Current Opinion* 63).

5. Conclusions

In this thesis, I have engaged with Rose's Lacanian approach to the study of children's literature for investigating the significance of the Peter Pan story, traditionally considered a classic within this genre whose captivating power has not waned throughout the years. This strikes one as surprising, given Rose's lucid account of the pitfalls of the Peter Pan materials. According to Rose, in no other children's text are the distorted conditions of production of children's literature so evident as in the Peter Pan fictions. Constant revisions, instability of language, ambiguous characters, a disquieting shadow text, hints at paedophilic tendencies – all these elements contribute to the recognition that the purity of language, which children's literature strives for, is certainly not attained in the Peter Pan materials. Peter Pan is not a text written for children, as Rose contends, but a consolatory myth for adults (Bown 173).

However, my analysis has highlighted that the reflections upon the relationship between adulthood and childhood evoked by the Peter Pan fictions are ultimately not consolatory at all for adults either. The subversion of didacticism foregrounded by the novel, and the association of adulthood with the demise of imagination together with the sense of tragic loss determined by the awareness that childhood has to necessarily end (exemplified by the recurrent image of Peter being barred from the nursery) – elicit disquieting sentiments that cannot be reconducted to the conventional and reassuring frame of a children's story, where all tensions in the end have to be resolved. The enchantment of children's literature is constantly put under strain by Barrie by means of narrative devices, such as the use of double address, the metaliterary references within the text and the unsettling return-to-reality closure described by Gilead. In the course of my research, I have even repeatedly asked myself whether Rose had chosen a convenient case study to support her argument. As a matter of fact, the fallacies of children's literature that she elucidates so perceptively are so plainly

exposed in the Peter Pan fictions that, as Nodelman observed, it is impossible to overlook that it is not a book for children.

The aim of this thesis has been to inquire about the reasons for the success of Peter Pan as a cultural icon of children's literature despite its many flaws when we consider what is traditionally expected from children's texts. To answer this question, I have implemented Rose's Lacanian approach with two strands of research. First, I have drawn upon the parallel between ontogenesis and phylogenesis posited by Freud to show that in the Peter Pan fictions, children are no longer the incarnation of a lost purity to be protected or retrieved by adults. On the contrary, they become a repository of imagination, indomitable passion for playfulness and barbarian primitivism. Furthermore, the Peter Pan materials resonate with Freud's notion that the fears and drives of the early stages of human development are likely to resurge at any time in the human development of the individual, notwithstanding the demands of the cultural program. This is most evident, in Barrie's narratives by the fact that children are constantly trading sides with adults. Adults behave childishly (Mr. Darling), whereas children act as behaving adults (the Darling siblings playing their parents; Wendy staging herself as her mother in Neverland). The barrier between childhood and adulthood is a thin veil, which puts in question both the didacticism intrinsic in children's literature and the idea of adults as moral guides to their offspring.

Second, I have demonstrated that the Edwardian escapist fantasies of the time find more than an echo in the Peter Pan fictions. My research has emphasised the fact that there were historical and cultural conditions that made the desire to bond with the child not only possible but also desirable in the Edwardian era. Escapism was no longer a moral taboo at least for two reasons. The birth of a structured consumer society fuelled the idea of prolonging endless playfulness as a consumer. Additionally, the idea itself establishes that the

New Imperial politics could be revived by means of a new colonial attitude characterised by unscrupulous boyishness. Recent scholarly works have indeed shown that despite an apparent economic optimism, the position of the British Empire was seen to become more fragile.⁶⁷ As a response to this sense of imminent demise, adults turned to children for taming their own anxieties. Therefore, I have inquired into the cultural context of the Peter Pan fictions to explore why the idea of bonding with the child by blurring the divide between adulthood and childhood proved to be so captivating in the Edwardian era.

In my opinion, my examination of the cultural conditions informing Barrie's work does not represent a disavowal of Rose's psychoanalytical approach. On the contrary, my references to the cultural climate of the Edwardian era are aimed at underpinning Rose's perceptive argument, setting it against a historical and cultural backdrop which, in my view, is essential for understanding specific characteristics of the Peter Pan fictions. Within this frame of reference, I have explained the process that has led to the deconstruction of Victorian fairy tale lore in the Peter Pan fictions, where fairyland is turned into the treacherous Neverland. Subsequently, I explored the origins of the uncomfortable paedophilic passages of the Ur-Peter Pan novel *The Little White Bird* and the reason why they seem to have passed totally unobserved among the contemporary audience. Finally, I highlighted the specificity of characters such as Tinker Bell and Captain Hook who despite of their unconventionality have become icons of children's literature as much as Peter Pan. I have thus contended that Barrie's narrative world – beyond the psychoanalytical, distorted conditions of production described by Rose with regard to children's literature – is also the outcome of the ideological constraints imposed by the cultural, economic, political conditions of his time. By doing so, I paved the way to my analysis of ISAs in the second part of the

⁶⁷ See the references to Jonathan Wild's and John Darwin's scholarly work in the Introduction to Chapter 3.

thesis.

In my view, Barrie was much more aware of the characteristics of the literary field in which he operated than Rose's analysis would allow for. Hence, his progressive enhancing of the predominance of boyishness in the Peter Pan fictions, and most significantly, his questioning of male authority. This has become clearer in my analysis of the dedication "To the Five" and speech "Captain Hook at Eton". In both the texts, in my view, Barrie gives free rein to a celebration of what can be considered the most distinctive traits of children's behaviour – and that are more likely to be suppressed in adult age – like their inexhaustible imagination and craving for stories. In the dedication "To the Five", Barrie's homage to the power of imagination is achieved by putting the Llewelyn Boys at the very centre of the creative act. In "Captain Hook at Eton", a similar outcome is reached through the performative nature of the speech itself, delivered as a background story – a move that ultimately effaces the borders between art and creativity on one hand and real life on the other. The reason why I have referred more specifically to a challenged male authority is that in both texts, the stories recounted are removed from the sphere of the nursery, which was still dominated by the fabulistic talents of Wendy and Mrs. Darling, to be enacted as an exclusive male affair within a close homosocial relationship.

The methodology adopted in my analysis of the ISA's of education and of the cultural apparatus has substantiated this view. As Althusser teaches, ideology can hail individuals only by exposing them to an imaginary representation of reality in which they can recognise themselves. Viewed under this aspect, the ISA of education has constraints related to the domestic agenda (education is institutionalised on a national basis) that the ISA of the cultural apparatus does not have. My analysis of the ideology of education with regard to the Peter Pan fictions has shown a straightforward will to erase all those passages that impaired the

unified and stable language deemed suitable for elementary school pupils. In contrast, the ideology of the cultural apparatus has eradicated those aspects of the Peter Pan materials which have been pinned down as being more unsettling according to the time of the film productions. My analysis shows that the ISA of the cultural apparatus has been able to tame Barrie's anti-didacticism, demonstrating a particular preoccupation with the depiction of weakened masculine authority and the display of ruthless boyishness posited by Barrie's narratives. Most significantly, the two case studies considered in my thesis reconstitute the patriarchal family that had been debunked by Barrie. Disney's film directed its ideological forces especially at erasing sexual ambiguities. Consequently, Peter Pan was transformed into a teenager with a great charm among female characters; moreover, Tinker Bell's sexuality was amplified to the point of making her an imitation of the sex symbols of the era. Spielberg's film *Hook* has hailed individuals by presenting us with a Peter Pan/Peter Banning who manages to overcome the sense of alienation he was entrapped in to become a better father, fit to guide his family. In both the films, the divide between adulthood and childhood has clearly been maintained in opposition to the crossing of borders that marks Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. The possibility of adults' regression to childhood is denied and, more significantly, the two films show no regret about this change.

Among the characters emerging from Barrie's narrative imagination, in my analysis, I have paid special attention to Tinker Bell and Captain Hook, for whom I have developed a special affection in the course of my research. I believe that in the constellation of characters of the Peter Pan fictions, these are the two most ambiguous figures. As the figures of Tinker Bell and Captain Hook were most indebted to the tradition of fairy lore and pirate lore, respectively, I believe that Barrie felt that through his unconventional depictions of these two characters, he could undermine and possibly mock both traditions more freely than he could

have with more realistic figures. However paradoxical this may seem, the depiction of these two fantastic creatures with all their complexities and sufferings endows them with a higher degree of human sensibility than the Darlings, for instance, who often resemble the stock characters of the pantomime. Condemned to isolation by their status as semi-human (Tinker Bell) and semi-outcast (Captain Hook), these two characters are the most individualised in the Peter Pan fictions. The subtlety with which Tinker Bell and Captain Hook are depicted leads me to think that Barrie too may have had a penchant for these two figures, who ultimately, together with Peter, embody his cherished trope of the “betwixt-and-between”. It is no coincidence that Tinker Bell and Captain Hook have been targets of the most efficient bowdlerisation in the two film adaptations. Disney’s film completely dismissed a pivotal scene in the novel where Tinker Bell drinks the poisonous drink destined for Peter and is saved by Peter’s appeal to the audience. Tinker Bell’s dependence on the children’s beliefs in her, as highlighted by this episode, was neutralised due to the distinct sensibility of the Disney studios to the role of the imagination among its audience. Representing the benchmark of twentieth-century’s cinematic imagination, the Disney Studios obviously could not easily raise doubts as to their audience’s capacity to believe. In Spielberg’s film, Tinker is transformed into an androgynous fairy creature, devoid of the cruel intents that characterise her in Barrie’s versions. As far as Captain Hook’s role is concerned in the two films, he is Peter’s antagonist *par excellence*, whereas in the Peter Pan fictions he is rather seen as Peter’s alter ego. As a result, in both the films, he lost much of his allure because of the total erasing of the hints that could possibly link him and Peter. Indeed, I have shown that in both the film adaptations, the divide between evil forces and redemption is strict and the ambiguous commonalities between Peter and Hook consequently has to be neutralised.

I would like to conclude my research with a last glance at the statue of Peter Pan by Frampton, which I invoked at the outset of my thesis. As may be already clear, I have

analysed the strategies used by the ISA of education and the ISA of the cultural apparatus bearing Frampton's statue in mind. ISAs have indeed tamed the instability of the Peter Pan fictions by emerging from the unsettling base of the source text, the enchanting image of the young boy blowing his pipe. I think they have succeeded in their aim. However disjunctive both adaptations may be, most of their internal contradictions may easily be overlooked by those who are not familiar with the Peter Pan fictions in their literary form. Although I have refrained in my thesis from adopting an approach based on response theory, I believe that my analysis of the film versions confirms that their narratives can easily supplant the original text in the imaginary of our culture. Similarly, when looking at the Peter Pan's statue in Kensington Gardens, I think it is easy to be charmed by the young boy blowing his pipe, thus neglecting what happens under it in the confused composition of the plinth. We are all likely to ignore the "Devil" in Peter Pan, as Barrie complained. No wonder then that children do not read *Peter Pan* any more. As a matter of fact, as Rose taught us, the Peter Pan fictions did not speak to the child. Their disquieting content could perhaps still be palatable for some adults, but it would be hard to deny that the less challenging versions of *Peter Pan* proposed by the ISAs are more reassuring and thus more charming for a young audience and their parents faced with the difficulty of choosing a convenient narrative for their offspring. However, my analysis has shown to what extent the school edition and the films adaptation were driven by adults' anxieties. This brings us back to Rose's argument that the stability of language sought after in children's narratives is really the expression of adult demands. If Barrie's texts did not speak to the child, borrowing Rose's terminology, I would say that ISA cultural apparatuses do not either. If they have imposed themselves, overshadowing the original narratives, it is because they needed to hide the core of unsettling notions in the Peter Pan fictions, i.e., the longing for boyhood, the performative role assigned to the imagination and the blurred divide

between adults and children. I have shown to what extent these disquieting elements still had a *raison d'être* in the cultural background of the Edwardian era and were not resented as disquieting. However, they would have not been able to hail the subject under the distinct conditions of production of the Disney and Spielberg films. The force of ideology lies precisely in its capacity of reproducing and renovating itself to perpetuate its mechanisms. The Peter Pan story and its timeless hero have often been referred to as the emblem of the *puer aeternus*, whose dimension lies in a cyclical vision of time. But, this vision does not apply when ideology is concerned. ISAs constantly have to create new imaginary conditions to supplant the older ones. Like Saturn, they have to devour their sons to stay alive.

Appendix 1



George Frampton. *Peter Pan*, bronze (1912). Kensington Gardens, London.

Appendix 2



Queen Mab, illustration by Arthur Rackham, 1906.

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