Drew University College of Liberal Arts
"You Will Always Be Known as 'a Betwixt-and-Between'"
J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* and its Afterlives
A Thesis in English
by
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Abstract

J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* is an incredibly fungible text that has endured numerous adaptations since its creation. In this thesis I will argue that *Peter Pan* has remained a cultural focus for over one hundred years because both the story and Peter himself exist in an unclassifiable, liminal state that has led to re-appropriations for new cultural purposes. I will illuminate binary relationships found in *Peter Pan* by utilizing a blend of two approaches: biographical, to discover the relationship between J.M. Barrie's life and the story he created, and historicist, to view the works in their own historical context to see which elements of the text supported cultural views of the time, which challenged them, and how *Peter Pan* was appropriated during the years after it was written. I will conclude with the discovery that new versions of *Peter Pan* emerged during periods of immense cultural discomfort, and that the story itself functions both as a cultural instrument and a mirror. The aspect that draws us most to *Peter Pan* is not simply the allure of childhood, but the fascination with and fear of his constantly altering state.

"Poor little half-and-half," said Solomon, who was not really hard-hearted, "you will never be able to fly again, not even on windy days. You must live here on the island always."

"And never even go to the Kensington Gardens?" Peter asked tragically.

"How could you get across?" said Solomon. He promised very kindly, however, to teach Peter as many of the bird ways as could be learned by one of such an awkward shape.

"Then I shan't be exactly a human?" Peter asked.

"No."

"Nor exactly a bird?"

"No."

"What shall I be?"

"You will be a Betwixt-and-Between," Solomon said, and certainly he was a wise old fellow, for that is exactly how it turned out.

J.M. Barrie *The Little White Bird*

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Introduction
"All Children, Except One, Grow Up"

> I don't know whether you have ever seen the 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, with astonishing splashes of colour here and there…of course the Neverlands vary a good deal…but on the whole the Neverlands have a family resemblance, and if they stood still in a row you could say of them that they have each other's nose, and so forth. On these magic shores, children at play are forever beaching their coracles. We too have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 11-12).

It is said that one can see their own Neverland if one closes their eyes. Shut them tightly and one shall see a pool of lovely, pale colors. Close them tighter and the pool will take on different shapes. Even tighter, and they will glow so brightly it is almost as if they are on fire, and in that brief second between the pool of colors and the blinding light, the Neverland will appear (Charlap, Leigh 26-27). It is a magical land that nearly every child will be familiar with and every grown-up child will remember. J.M. Barrie's Neverland has captivated spectators for generations, but audiences' connection to the Peter Pan narrative is deeper than merely the draw to childhood and remaining youthful forever. Barrie explains that every child's Neverland is different, but that they also have a family resemblance—something that connects them no matter the variations. The Neverlands, in this respect, are not dissimilar to the Peter Pan narrative itself, which has, throughout the century, transformed into different versions, crossed multiple medias and genres, and yet still maintained a connection, a "family

resemblance" to the original story. Its many versions have enchanted generations of audiences since 1904 and still continue to do so to this day.

I confess to having a very personal attachment to J.M. Barrie's story, which fascinated me at a very young age. My early years were filled with making "Wendy house" forts and playing pirates with my brothers, watching Mary Martin's iconic performance on VHS, and hoping every night that this would be the one when Peter Pan would come to take me to Neverland and a world of eternal adventure—after all, I had two younger brothers, my father was a banker like Mr. Darling, and we had a big, loving dog who cared for us. That was all the evidence I needed that Wendy Darling and I were one and the same and that Peter was certainly on his way. I was to find out that I was not the only one to be enthralled by J.M. Barrie's tale of the eternally youthful child. After all, it is a story that has stood the test of time for over one hundred years and has taken its place in folklore next to classics like *Cinderella, Snow White,* and *Hansel and Gretel.*

In the following chapters, I intend to explore such questions as "why has *Peter Pan* remained relevant for more than a century, from its creation to today," "what is it about Neverland and the character of Peter Pan that fascinates us as a culture," and "how have both the story and representations of Peter Pan changed throughout time? Do those changes reflect the views of a particular era or culture?" I would also like to examine not only how the changes in productions, films, and texts inspired by the original novel have reproduced the changing culture from decade to decade, but also how the story may have pushed against or challenged particular accepted beliefs or cultural norms. How did *Peter Pan*

respond to the changing times? How was it reconditioned for new cultural purposes?

The thesis will function chronologically with a historical focus, moving from the early twentieth century to the twenty-first. I will focus on a primary piece in each chapter—the original works *Peter Pan, Or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* and *Peter and Wendy* in Chapter One, the Disney film *Peter Pan* in Chapter Two, and *Peter and the Starcatchers* (novel and play) in Chapter Three—touching on other forms created at that time if needed. I will look at the particular production, film, or literary Peter Pan piece to examine how the works have pushed particular binary relationships throughout the century in order to use the story as a tool for new cultural purposes. I intend to argue that *Peter Pan* has remained a cultural focus for over one hundred years because the story and Peter himself exist in an unclassifiable, liminal state that has led to re-appropriations for new cultural purposes.

Methodology

I will illuminate multiple binaries found in both the play *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904. After this point it will be referred to simply as *Peter Pan*) and the novel *Peter and Wendy* (1911) such as youth/adulthood, reality/fantasy, male/female, and life/death. I intend to explore these binaries through the thematic structure of the Victorian ideal of "the angel in the house", and, most importantly, by examining the novel and play's relationship to World War I, a relationship which presents an additional binary—the contrast between a

fantasy world where boys remain forever young to a real life world where young men are dying.

In order to do this, I intend to utilize a blend of two approaches: Firstly, I will implement a biographical approach. I will focus on events and people in Barrie's life that he constructed meaning for in his works. I will work with close readings of portions of *Peter Pan* (1904) the play and *Peter and Wendy* (1911) the novel. I intend to discover the relationship between J.M. Barrie's life and the story he created. Barrie uses the writing of *Peter Pan* as an avenue to clarify and interpret people and events in his life. In *Peter Pan,* one finds Barrie's expression of grief from losing his elder brother at a young age, his attempt to make sense of death, his overwhelming respect for his mother and the beautiful mother figures he encountered that held the homes together, his love of childhood imagination, and his feelings of isolation—of being the only person he knew who was in age a man but in spirit a child. I intend to use biographical criticism to explain how these ideas shaped Barrie's work and brought light to his unacknowledged personal struggle, to find the split between childhood and adulthood, which the author attempts to comprehend through the character of Peter Pan. In this way, Peter Pan, the boy who *would* not grow up, exists as an avenue for Barrie to make sense of his own personal conundrum—living as the boy who *could* not grow up. Peter makes the choice to remain a boy forever, where Barrie feels powerless to transform his fate. I intend to unearth what these parallels between life and literature and between past and present, or, more notably, the binary opposition between childhood and adulthood, signify for Barrie.

Secondly, I intend to use a historicist approach in order to view the works in their own historical context and to see which elements of the text supported cultural views of the time, what challenged them, and how the story of Peter Pan was appropriated during the years after it was written and after Barrie died, therefore relinquishing authorial control. After the biographical close reading, I will discuss the implications of *Peter Pan* for both British and American culture of the early twentieth century and American culture in the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. *Peter Pan* is not only a product of the culture in which it existed, but also shaped and influenced it, especially during these selected periods.

Definitions of Key Terms

Liminality- existing in an in-between or transitional state. It occurs when something occupies a position in the middle of two boundaries. The liminal state of both the character Peter Pan and the story of *Peter Pan* render both the narrative and the protagonist unclassifiable. Peter Pan is not human or fairy, old or young, masculine or feminine, or good or evil; he exists between these binaries.

Binary opposition- a pair of related terms that exist in opposition to one another. It is a relationship between opposing ideas with which we understand the meanings of words. Many structuralist theorists believe that our comprehension of words comes not from the meaning of the words themselves, but from the word's relationship to its opposite. This idea is very important to understanding the liminal state of Peter Pan and his creator, for both exist in the in-between state of many binary relationships.

Peter Pan's in-between state has enabled many interpreters of the story to re-appropriate the narrative for new cultural purposes. Some examples of binary oppositions one will encounter in this paper are good/evil, past/future, youth/adulthood, reality/fantasy, masculine/feminine, and life/death.

"The angel in the house"-a term to describe women who embodied the Victorian feminine ideal. It became the socially acceptable model of passive womanhood. The "angel in the house" was a selfless wife and mother who devoted her life to caring for her children, obeying her husband, and making the home space more beautiful. The angel was submissive, graceful, beautiful, powerless, and, above all, pure. This Victorian ideal reemerged during the early twentieth century and, more specifically, in Barrie's writing as a harkening back to past times of British empire and security in a time when the nation was losing its ruling grasp. The women themselves were tasked with the burden of being examples of the strength of British empire and of reproducing these values in foreign lands. Both Mrs. Darling and Wendy exist in *Peter Pan* as examples of this ideal. He based these characters upon "angels in the house" figures in his own life, such as his mother, Margaret Ogilvy, and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, mother of the Davies boys.

The "male gaze"-a feminist concept that states that women were sexually objectified in film because heterosexual men were in control of the camera. It occurs when the viewing audience of a film is shown the perspective of a heterosexual man. This perception puts the male in the dominant role of

the viewer and the female in the submissive view as the subject. This concept appears in chapters two and three when film versions of *Peter Pan* are discussed. In many versions of *Peter Pan*, female characters like the mermaids, Tinker Bell, Wendy or the Wendy figure (in the case of Molly in *Peter and the Starcatchers*), and Tiger Lily are sexualized in their portrayal or description.

Imperialism-the policy of extending rule over a smaller nation, usually by an empire. It is the state of control over one state of people over another. Themes of imperialism are abundant in Barrie's original *Peter Pan*, as England was still then a conquering force. The theme of imperialism later makes a reappearance in the 2004 novel *Peter and the Starcatchers* and the 2011 play *Peter and the Starcatcher* as a way to connect the contemporary works to the time Barrie was writing in.

Brief J.M. Barrie Biography

On May 9, 1860, James M. Barrie was born to David Barrie and Margaret Ogilvy in Scotland (Birkin 3). He was the ninth of ten children and had two older brothers: Alexander, who was a proficient scholar and graduated from Aberdeen University with first class honors in Classics, and David, who was "tall, athletic, handsome and charming, the Golden Boy of his mother's eye" (3). When J.M. Barrie was six, his brother David died in a tragic skating accident. His mother never recovered from the incident, and David's memory haunted Barrie for his entire life. Barrie later enrolled at the University of Edinburgh where he wrote

drama reviews. He graduated in 1882 with his M.A. and later moved to London to begin his literary career (13).

In London, he first worked as a journalist. In later years, he published a variety of works, both novels and plays. The early criticism he received was unfavorable, as critics disparaged his sentimental authorial voice, but he later received acclaim for his works for the theatre. His work in the theatre led him to actress Mary Ansell, who would later become his wife in 1894 (Birkin 29). Barrie bought a Saint Bernard puppy, which later became the basis for Nana in *Peter Pan*, for himself and Ansell and would frequent Kensington Gardens with it. It was there that he met young George and Jack Llewelyn Davies and befriended them. He would later meet their mother, Sylvia, at a dinner party (45). Barrie used his relationship with George Llewelyn Davies as the basis for his novel *The Little White Bird*. He told the young George and Jack stories about their brother Peter that would later became the foundation of *Peter Pan*.

Barrie's presence became a staple in the Llewelyn Davies family, much to the dislike of the boys' father, Arthur Llewelyn Davies. Barrie attended many family gatherings and spent the summer with the boys' at his cottage at the Black Lake (the Llewelyn Davies had a neighboring cottage) (Birkin 87). He witnessed the boys growing up and the births of Michael and Nicolas (Nico). Barrie adored developing games and stories for the boys that he could partake in with them. In 1904 and 1905, *Peter Pan* premiered in London and America, respectively, to great acclaim. In 1906, Arthur Llewelyn Davies began to grow ill and in 1907 he died from cancer (134). Barrie provided financial support for the family at that time, even though Sylvia initially refused any form of charity (154). In 1910,

Sylvia died as well, leaving the boys orphaned. There have been discrepancies about her will, which Barrie copied for her. The copy he made read "what I would like would be if Jimmy would come to Mary [Hodgson, their childhood nurse], and that the two together would be looking after the boys," but it has been said that in the original will "Sylvia had not written 'Jimmy' but 'Jenny'—Mary Hodgson's sister" (194). Regardless of the original will's request, Barrie remained a tremendous presence in the boys' lives.

In 1915, George Llewelyn Davies, who, along with his brothers John and Peter, had gone to fight in World War I, was killed in action (Birkin 245). Later that year, Barrie's great friend and theatrical producer of *Peter Pan,* Charles Frohman, died when the ship he was travelling on was hit by a torpedo (247). Barrie was greatly tormented by these deaths, as were the Davies boys. He continued to care for them and to publish more plays while *Peter Pan* was still being performed every Christmas in London in the pantomime tradition as well as traveling on tours through England and America. In 1921, on the eve of his twenty-first birthday, Michael Llewelyn Davies drowned with a friend at a known danger spot near Oxford, where he was attending school (292). Barrie never recovered from his despair after Michael's death, and he is recorded as saying "for ever and ever, I am thinking about him" (294). He constantly spoke of Michael, who had been his favorite of the boys, as "the lad that will never be old" (300). Before his death in 1937, Barrie gave all rights to *Peter Pan* to the Great Ormond Street Hospital in London and received countless achievements for his work. He left the bulk of his estate to his secretary, Cynthia Asquith (291).

Chart of Important Works/Production History

Date	**Title of Work/ Production**	**Media**	**Where**	**Notable Performers/Authors**
1902	*The Little White Bird*	Novel	London	By J.M. Barrie
December, 27, 1904 (premiere)	*Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*	Play	Duke of York's Theatre, London	Nina Boucicault- Peter Pan Gerald du Maurier- Captain Hook/ Mr. Darling Hilda Trevelyan- Wendy
1905-1906	*Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*	Play	Empire Theatre, New York	Maude Adams- Peter Pan
1906	*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*	Novel-six self-contained chapters about Peter Pan as a baby	London	By J.M. Barrie
1911	*Peter and Wendy* (later known as *Peter Pan*)	Novel	London	By J.M. Barrie
1924	*Peter Pan*	Silent Film	Paramount Studios	Betty Bronson- Peter Pan Ernest Torrence- Captain Hook Cyril Chadwick- Mr. Darling Anna May Wong- Tiger Lily
1953	*Peter Pan*	Animated Film	Walt Disney Studios	Bobby Driscoll- Peter Pan Hans Conried- Captain Hook/ Mr. Darling Kathryn Beaumont- Wendy
1954	*Peter Pan*	Musical	Winter Garden Theatre, New	Mary Martin- Peter Pan Cyril Ritchard- Captain Hook/ Mr. Darling

			York	Kathy Nolan- Wendy Heller Halliday (Martin's daughter)- Liza
March 7, 1955	*Peter Pan*	Television Broadcast	NBC Producer's Showcase (performed live)	*See above cast*
January 9, 1956	*Peter Pan*	Television Broadcast	NBC Producer's Showcase (performed live)	*See above cast*
December 8, 1960	*Peter Pan*	Television Broadcast	NBC	Mary Martin- Peter Pan Cyril Ritchard- Captain Hook/ Mr. Darling Maureen Bailey- Wendy
1990-2009	*Peter Pan*	Musical	American Tour	Cathy Rigby- Peter Pan
1991	*Hook*	Film	TriStar Pictures	Dir. Stephen Spielberg Robin Williams- Peter Banning Dustin Hoffman- Captain Hook Julia Roberts- Tinker Bell
2003	*Peter Pan*	Film	Universal Pictures	Dir. P.J. Hogan Jeremy Sumpter- Peter Pan Jason Issacs- Captain Hook Rachel Hurd Wood- Wendy
2004	*Peter and the Starcatchers*	Novel	Disney Editions: Hyperion Books for Children/NY	By Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson
March 28, 2012 (first preview)*	*Peter and the Starcatcher*	Play	Brooks Atkinson Theatre, New York	Playwright-Rick Elice Christian Borle- Black Stache Celia Keenan-Bolger- Molly Adam Chanler-Berat-

				Boy
2011-**	*Once Upon A Time*	Television Show	ABC	Jennifer Morrison- Emma Swan Colin O'Donoghue- Captain Hook Robbie Kay- Peter Pan

(Hanson, Appendix B).

*-"PLAYBILL." *Peter and the Starcatcher on Broadway*. Playbill Inc., 2012. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.
**-"Once Upon a Time." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, 2011. Web. 17 Apr. 2014.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter One

In the first chapter, I will first explore the play and novel's relationship to Barrie's life to interpret how he processed personal events through *Peter Pan* and then to document the effects that world events had on his writing, eventually causing him to call for the removal of one of the play's crucial scenes in performance and also bringing about his further seclusion into the fantasy world he had created. The role that fantasy played for Barrie is inherently tied to the role fantasy played collectively for English culture, both during the war and post-WWI. I intend to argue that while *Peter Pan* began as a story that purely "signified an eternal boyhood" that spoke to the author's own experiences and his tie to the past, it went on to become a "floating signifier, a construction of social meaning" that presented a suspension of time in order to underlie the cultural grief of a nation that was losing its empire as fast as it was losing its boys to death in the trenches (Robertson 50).

Barrie's connection to the past, as seen through his complex relationship with childhood, his veneration of his mother, and his appreciation of past

Victorian ideals, speaks to the divide between past and future that England was caught in at the time he was writing. Just as Barrie's semi-autobiographical character Peter Pan existed as "betwixt-and-between," so did England at the dawn of the twentieth century—between a past of imperialism and a future loss of empire (Barrie *The Little White Bird* 60).

Chapter Two

After introducing the liminal Peter Pan and the many binaries that Barrie establishes, I will move from the dawn of the twentieth century to post-WWII, a time of extreme social and political change. During this time, two extremely popular versions of *Peter Pan* emerged: The Broadway Musical *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin and the Disney animated film *Peter Pan*. These two versions are still incredibly popular today, and are the most common cultural associations when one mentions "Peter Pan." The two 1950's creations treat Barrie's story very differently, though. While Martin's *Peter Pan* embraces much of the original version's ambiguity, especially in respect to gender, Disney seeks to define those ambiguous binaries. In this way, the two versions present contrasting reactions to the intense social and political changes in mid-twentieth century America.

Much of this chapter focuses on Disney's 1953 *Peter Pan* film and the ambiguous binaries that made the company and its creator so uncomfortable when setting out to create a "family entertainment" film. Much work was done to clearly define Peter Pan's gender by making him "all boy" and the female characters, to contrast him, occupy strict female gender roles. Disney also actively worked to divide the worlds of fantasy and reality in order to propagate the

message that fantasy is fine and good for children, but there comes a time when one must grow up to accept adult responsibility because that is the correct thing to do. Disney's version clung to values that were readily disappearing and nearly obsolete at the time of the film's premiere, but it is still revered as a timeless Disney classic today.

Chapter Three

Chapter three begins with the fact that American culture has inherited two extremely popular versions of the story: the Mary Martin musical and the Disney film. The Disney film becomes the most culturally recognizable of the two, particularly because Disney Animations turns the character of Tinker Bell into a marketing tool, which opens almost every film, making the Disney version the new standard *Peter Pan*, effectively replacing Barrie. Therefore, subsequent versions either actively work against Disney or seek to copy that version to perpetuate its commercial success.

I begin examining Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's novel *Peter and the Starcatchers* and the play that was inspired by it entitled *Peter and the Starcatcher* (no "s"). *Peter and the Starcatchers* perpetuates much of what Disney did in 1953 and translates it for a twenty-first century audience. The play version of the story is a bit more progressive, especially in the realm of gender roles, but also changes the place of narrative in performance by placing the stagecraft and spectacle before the actual story. I then move to an examination of a new trend of "dark" Peter Pan interpretations that make Pan the villain. These versions are actively working against the benevolent Disney creation, but by distancing themselves from the "good" Peter Pan, they are still strictly defining a

binary similarly to Disney. Interpreters of the *Peter Pan* narrative in the twentieth century are nearly as uncomfortable with ambiguity as the Disney writers and animators were.

Peter Pan **Plot Summary**

Contrary to popular belief, the play *Peter Pan, Or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* is not the first work in which Peter Pan appears by name. In 1902, J.M. Barrie published a novel entitled *The Little White Bird,* which chronicles a relationship between Captain W and David; the relationship is semi-autobiographical in nature for Barrie based the characters upon himself and George Llewelyn Davies, respectively. In the novel, Captain W recounts tales of a fantastical boy who ran away to Kensington Gardens to live among the fairies so that he would not grow up. This version of Peter Pan, however, greatly differs from the character many are familiar with because he is only a week old. Barrie, who identified as both a novelist and a playwright, then forwarded his creation to the stage.

In 1904, Barrie's play *Peter Pan, Or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* was first performed in London with Nina Boucicault in the title role. It was produced under the guidance of American Charles Frohman, who was a great friend of Barrie's and who convinced him to change the play's title from the original *The Great White Father* to *Peter Pan, Or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. It was then performed in America in 1905 with Maude Adams, a favorite of Frohman's in the title role. The play opens on the Darling family, a typical lower-middle class London family who have three children (Wendy, John, and Michael). Peter Pan makes nighttime calls on the Darling house to listen to the bedtime stories that

Mrs. Darling tells the children, and one night he is spotted and when trying to escape loses his shadow. He comes back to claim it on a night when the parents are out and the dog nurse, Nana, has been chained outside, and he wakes up Wendy in his attempt to stick his shadow back on with soap. The two converse, and Wendy finds that Peter, who has lived without a mother for so long, does not know what a kiss is and mistakes it for a small token. They exchange a thimble and an acorn as "kisses." When Wendy reattaches his shadow, Peter learns that she knows lots of bedtime stories so he convinces her to leave with her brothers to join him in Neverland, a land where children never grow up. He uses fairy dust from his fairy companion Tinker Bell to give them the ability to fly to "the second star to the right, and straight on 'til morning" (Barrie).

When the children and Peter arrive in Neverland after a long journey, they are nearly blown out of the air by the pirates led by the nefarious Captain Hook. As Peter battles Hook, he sends Tinker Bell to make sure Wendy arrives at the home of the Lost Boys safely. Tinker Bell, in a fit of jealousy, convinces the Lost Boys that Wendy is a "Wendy Bird" that Peter wants them to kill. Wendy is nearly shot out of the sky by Lost Boy Tootles, but is saved when the arrow hits the "kiss" that Peter gave her, which is an acorn on a chain around her neck. As Wendy recuperates, Peter and the Lost Boys build a house around her. When she awakes, they implore her to be their mother, and she agrees. Peter agrees to adopt the role of father. Wendy and her brothers live a long time among the Lost Boys and they begin to adopt their ways and forget their home.

Peter takes the Darlings on many adventures with him, one of the most dangerous being the rescue of the Indian Princess Tiger Lily from the pirates in

Mermaid Lagoon. Peter battles the evil Captain Hook to save the princess, but becomes critically wounded when Hook claws him with his hook. Wendy and the injured Peter become stranded on a rock as the water grows higher and higher, and he chivalrously gives Wendy their only avenue of escape. Peter believes he will surely perish, and utters his famed line "to die will be an awfully big adventure" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 87). Luckily, a mother bird that Peter had aided before offers her nest to him, and he safely paddles to shore.

Meanwhile, Wendy has begun to notice that her brothers have nearly forgotten their home and real parents and becomes fearful. She has also begun to develop feelings for Peter, but when she asks him how he feels about her, he responds that his feelings are "that of a devoted son" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 95). Wendy, upset by this new knowledge and missing her parents, decides that it is time for her and her brothers to return home. The Lost Boys decide that they too would like to have a real mother and father and beg Peter to leave with the Darlings. Peter agrees and sends them all away. While Peter is asleep, pirates capture the Darlings and the Lost Boys and Captain Hook attempts to poison Peter. When Peter awakes, Tinker Bell tells him that Hook has taken Wendy and the boys, and Peter, in a attempt to please Wendy, goes to drink the medicine that she had left for him. Tinker Bell attempts to warn him that the medicine is poisoned, but when that doesn't work she drinks it herself to save Peter's life. Tink, near death, tells a distraught Peter that her life may be saved if children believe in fairies. Peter implores the audience to clap their hands if they believe, and Tinker Bell is revived. Peter and Tinker Bell set out to save Wendy and the boys.

On the way to the ship, Peter encounters the ticking crocodile that ate Hook's hand. He decides to copy the tick so that the other animals will leave him alone and forgets that he is still ticking as he boards the ship. Hook cowers, believing that the crocodile is near, and the pirates search for the croc. Peter steals the keys to release the Lost Boys and kills off pirates as they enter the cabin one by one. When Peter reveals himself, he and Hook engage in their climactic battle, which Peter easily wins. Hook is eaten by the crocodile and Peter takes control over the ship which sets off for London. In an attempt to keep Wendy with him, Peter flies ahead to the Darling house to bar the window so that Wendy will think her mother has forgotten her. However, when he learns of Mrs. Darling's distress, he relents and allows Wendy, her brothers, and the Lost Boys to return to the Darling house. The Darlings adopt the Lost Boys and Mrs. Darling offers to adopt Peter too, but he refuses. Peter promises that he will visit Wendy every spring and Wendy implores him not to forget her.

The original play ends with a scene a year or so later during spring-cleaning when Peter has brought Wendy back to Neverland. Since Wendy has grown older, she has difficulty flying and requires the aid of a broomstick. The final stage directions portray Peter as a "betwixt-and-between" who exists between life and death. For this reason, he does not grasp the "riddle of his being" and therefore "no one is as gay as he" (Barrie *Peter Pan* 90). The play ends with a description of the viewer "waking up," implying that the audience is in a dream (Barrie *Peter Pan* 90). Four years after the premiere of the original production, Barrie wrote an additional scene called *An Afterthought* in which Peter comes back to the Darling nursery to find a grown up Wendy and her young

daughter, Jane. When Peter learns that Wendy has betrayed him by growing up, he convinces Jane to fly away to Neverland with him. This scene was only performed onstage once in Barrie's lifetime, but is now included in the musical version of the play and in many film versions, such as P.J. Hogan's 2003 *Peter Pan*.

In London in 1911, Hodder and Stoughton published the novel version of the play, entitled *Peter and Wendy*. The novel is currently published under the title of *Peter Pan*. The novel and the play are extremely similar in plot with differences occurring in only minor details. For example, the additional *An Afterthought* scene that Barrie wrote for the play was included in the plot of the novel. The novel also specifies that after Peter takes Jane to Neverland, he then takes her daughter, Margaret, and "when Margaret grows up she will have a daughter, who is to be Peter's mother in turn; and so it will go on , so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 159). In the novel, one also gains a deeper perspective of Captain Hook's character. Captain James Hook was previously an Eton boy, which rationalizes his obsession with good form. The final significant difference between the novel and the play is the description of Peter's nightmares that appear only in the novel. Barrie writes,

> sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys. For hours he could not be separated from these dreams, though he wailed piteously in them. They had to do, I think, with the riddle of his existence (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 115).

I will speak more about this passage in later chapters, but it is the most blatant acknowledgement that though Peter knows more joys than any other child, he

also knows deeper sorrows because of the "riddle of his existence," or the fact that he is unclassifiable and singular in his nature.

Through this exploration, I intend to argue that J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* establishes multiple binaries that lend both the story and the character of Peter Pan a liminality that speaks to real world tensions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The binaries that Barrie, whether consciously or unconsciously, established were used by readers to process a rapidly changing world, leading to the novel and play's immediate cult-like status in the United Kingdom and America. In fact, one could even say that the transforming Western world of the early twentieth century existed, like the novel's hero, between multiple binaries, most notably past and future. *Peter Pan* has been used as a device to perpetuate cultural, political, and social beliefs of a particular culture for more than a century and is still being so utilized today.

"To Die Will Be an Awfully Big Adventure": J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan and WWI

I. "You will be a betwixt-and-between"

"His works," Andrew Birkin writes of Barrie in *J.M. Barrie and the Lost Boys*, "are inextricably bound up with his own private world" (ix). There has been nearly as much obsession about Barrie's life as there has been about the "boy who would never grow up" that he created, which accounts for the numerous "biographical" film representations such as BBC's *The Lost Boys* (1978) and Miramax's *Finding Neverland* (2004). Many have been inquisitive as to what kind of man would create such a character and such a world. Many biographers cite uncanny similarities between Barrie and his literary creation, arguing that they are one and the same. Yet other scholars insist Barrie is more connected to Captain Hook in the respect that he is tormented at the hands of the ageless boy character he had created, saying that "Captain Hook is not the true villain of the story since he is just a representation of Barrie tortured by his child self who not only symbolically castrated him, thereby preventing him from any kind of sexual relationship and from integrating normally into the adult world" (Muñoz Corcuera 67). Whatever the case may be, it is certain that connections exist between Barrie and Peter Pan, for Peter Pan exists in a liminal state between youth and old age, life and death, good and evil, and many others while Barrie believed that he himself was doomed to live a tortured existence residing, just as Peter did, alone in an unclassifiable state.

The original text from the play *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* provided a way for Barrie to interpret the strangeness of his own life,

especially in respect to his isolation, inability to have a romantic relationship with a woman, and the easy friendships he formed with children, which were much easier to begin than those he had with adults. Barrie struggled to bridge the gap between childhood and adulthood; many biographers say that he himself remained a child, "an innocent" for his entire adult life (Birkin xii). In the play, stage directions mention outright and almost shockingly that Peter "is never touched by any one in the play" (Barrie *Peter Pan* 30). This could undoubtedly contribute to Peter's perception as "a Betwixt-and-Between", "a half-and-half", or as one who will always exist outside the human world as we know it (Barrie *The Little White Bird* 60). Peter is almost otherworldly in this respect—he exists outside the real world and in a world of fantasy and therefore cannot be touched. However, Peter's inability to be touched could also function in relation to Barrie's opinion of himself—as one who must always exist as an outsider.

Barrie's notebooks for the spring and summer of 1892, the year before he was to be married to Mary Ansell and over a decade before the first performance of *Peter Pan*, were "crammed with observations about himself and Mary Ansell ostensibly for a novel under the working title of 'The Sentimentalist'" (Birkin 23). Barrie writes that he "has got so sunk in books, they'll drown him, he'll become a parchment, a mummy" (Birkin 25). He fears he will turn to paper from lack of human contact. He later writes about his relationship with Mary directly, saying, "our love has brought me nothing but misery," despite the fact that finally having a romantic relationship should have brought him happiness (Birkin 29). Suggesting that he has become a mummy who has chosen books instead of humans for contact implies that Barrie, like Peter, could not be touched either

physically or emotionally. However, he is deeply unhappy by his circumstances and wishes "to become a favourite of the ladies which between you and me has always been my sorrowful ambition" (Birkin 21). Barrie, through his journal entries, presents a thought-provoking sense of his own contradictory nature: he wishes to find meaningful human contact with women to prevent himself from "mummifying" like his books, but is miserable in a romantic relationship. His inability to connect romantically with women relates to the interesting distinction between classifying Peter Pan as "the boy who *wouldn't* grow up" as opposed to the boy who *couldn't*. In this relationship, Peter is the boy who wouldn't, implying that there has been choice in his decision to remain singularly alone as a boy forever, while Barrie is the boy who couldn't, who wishes he had the power to change his circumstances but has no ability to do so. He desires to find love and happiness with Mary, but the conflict of his nature prevents him.

Barrie, like Peter, is a "betwixt-and-between"—he is, in age, a man but in mind, many ways still a child. He can belong to neither world completely, and can, like Peter, only glimpse the familial relationship through a window as an outsider. It is Barrie's childlike mental state that allowed him a great understanding of and camaraderie with young children, and also which provided his unique literary vision. When Barrie was a young writer fresh out of university, he "was only too well aware of the sentimental streak in him, and his intellect fought against it" (Birkin 13). Barrie's "sentimental streak" was not necessarily viewed as a childlike characteristic, but as a feminine one. By demonstrating such a profound understanding of female life, the home, and children, Barrie himself became viewed as a feminine man, and was therefore deemed weaker in the face

of his contemporaries. Victorian society, by "making men and women assume stereotypical roles…created a distance between the genders," caused readers to believe that if Barrie had such a connection to the feminine world, he must not fully be a man (Adams 6). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe in *No Man's Land* how Barrie as a writer would have been viewed in the early twentieth century: "contaminated by the woman, he has been feminized and paralyzed" (235). The choice of "paralyzed" in this quotation particularly applies to Barrie, who remained stunted between childhood and adulthood. Barrie's sentimental understanding of children rendered him damaged as a writer, for "femininity had almost always…been imagined as a negative rather than a positive force, an absence rather than a presence" (Gilbert, Gubar 12).

Barrie viewed his feminine sentiment as weakness and strove to banish the part of himself in order to highlight the "maleness" of his university-given intelligence and wit. Barrie viewed his own literary voice as existing between the male/female binaries of intellectual and sentimental, or rational and irrational, perceiving one side of each, the former, as superior to the latter. This struggle of himself is one that he battles with throughout his entire lifetime. In his journals, he describes increasing bouts of depression that would cause him to "'lie awake busy with the problems of my personality'" (Birkin 16). He saw his feminine sentiment, his understanding of children, and his love of fantasy, as connected to his inability to feel the passions of a normal adult man, rendering him defective. Because of this, in his youth he fought to quell his sentimental streak. Like Peter in many ways, Barrie was tormented by his existence as an outsider, unable to relate to all but a few adult friends, unable to feel sexual desire for his fiancée,

though he yearned so much to feel the passions of a normal man, and tied to a part of him that was deemed intellectual weakness in the face of other contemporaries. This confusion between the masculine and the feminine aspects of Barrie's personality had to be eliminated in later versions of *Peter Pan,* as shown in Chapter Two, in order to make *Peter Pan* marketable to later generations.

However, according to *The Times* in 1885, it was not Barrie's preferred "'cruelty of intellectual vision'" that originally brought him notoriety as an author, but the same feminine "'tenderness [that] came of his warm, trusting, but painfully sensitive heart'" that he had sought to repress (Birkin 16). Before even beginning to write *Peter Pan* at the dawn of the twentieth century, Barrie, in many literary works, toyed with the idea of a boy who would remain magically young forever. A shadow of Peter first appears in the "Peterkin" stories that Barrie makes up for his nephew, Christopher Barrie, in 1890. Christopher was one of the first of Barrie's child friends and undoubtedly made a great impression, for many qualities of "Peterkin," based on a young Christopher Barrie, remain in the play, the novel, and in interpretations to this day. "Peterkin" was a wily trickster, a charming and intelligent boy, and also "extremely destructive and anarchistic" (Birkin 19). The character of Peter is first alluded to in Barrie's play *Tommy and Grizel.* In the play, Tommy, who arguably represents Barrie in respect to being both a writer and a man trapped in childhood, discusses the idea of writing a novel with the main character being a boy who wandered alone in the forest, unable to grow up because he would not come home. In the novel *The Little White Bird,* Peter is first referred to by his full

name—Peter *Pan*, adding a connection to the Greek god Pan, who is often associated with trickery and the wildness of nature. The title "pan" also means "all" and can refer to Peter's unclassifiable nature and liminal state, for in being "all" he cannot be classified as anything. He is the only one of his kind. In *The Little White Bird*, Peter is also describes as a "psychopomp," or a being who buries dead children in twos so they would not be lonely, all while yearning for the life of a normal child that he could have had (Corcuera and Di Biase viii). However, in all these works, Peter only exists as an abstract idea and as a youth who is only "one week old" (Barrie *The Little White Bird* 2). The change in Peter to a fully realized character comes as a direct result of Barrie developing a relationship with the Llewelyn Davies boys.

II. "That is all he is. The spark I got from you"

It is almost entirely because of Barrie's relationship with the Llewelyn Davies boys that Peter moves from being "a dream-child" of Barrie's and gains his full depth and shape as a character in *Peter Pan*. In his dedication to the play written nearly twenty years after its original performance and after all the boys are grown, Barrie gives the play to them, for he claims to "have no recollection of having written it" and that he "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 *To the Five: A Dedication* 3). The naming of the boys in relationship to the play's characters are a testament to the attribution—all but one of the boys' names appears in the play, and the only reason Nicolas (Nico) is not included is that at the time Barrie wrote the play Nico had not yet been born. George, the eldest, is the namesake for Mr. George

Darling (the father), John and Michael lend their names to Wendy's brothers, and Peter, who was a baby at the time that Barrie began playing the "Lost Boy Castaways" game with young George and Michael, of course became Peter Pan.

Barrie transformed Peter Llewelyn Davies into Peter Pan by taking an idea he established in *The Little White Bird,* that all human babies were birds before they were born and as infants still retain the ability to fly. He used this idea to explain the adventures baby Peter Davies had to his elder brothers George and John. The Darling family is modeled after the Llewelyn Davies family—Arthur Llewelyn Davies is the strong patriarch who disliked the fantasy world brought to his house and who disliked Barrie (who represents Pan in this dynamic), and Sylvia was the perfect angel of the household who "embodied motherhood just as the boys embodied boyhood" and who held Barrie's adoration and admiration (Birkin 59). In spite of Arthur's dislike of Barrie and of the fantastical tales he told his sons, Barrie idealized the family's dynamic and "was devoted to Sylvia and Arthur's devotion to each other"—he was not jealous of their relationship but instead idolized it (Birkin 59). Though Barrie adored Sylvia, he met the boys, George and John, first, and they were what originally drew him to the quaint, middle-class family. He identified closely with the boys, especially the eldest, George, and created wonderful adventures, games, and stories specifically to appeal to them. In fact, traces of Peter Pan, Hook, and the Never Land can be found in a photograph book Barrie created to document the boys' adventures at his summer home entitled *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island,* created when both families were vacationing, staying in cottages within a five-minute walking distance of each other (Birkin 83).

Through the adventures he crafted with the boys, Barrie could become one of them—he could feel at home in his own skin. This comfort motivated him to create *Peter Pan or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* and set him free to develop his unique authorial voice, which features both the satirical intellect of his post-graduate writing that could be "'as harsh as nails, as cruel as the grave, and as cynical as the Fiend'" and his sentimental connection to childhood that he had until this time striven to suppress (Birkin 16). His relationship to the Llewelyn Davies family gave him the tools to take the idea of a boy who remained young forever from the trapped-in-childhood stage of his earlier works (*Sentimental Tommy* and *Tommy and Grizel)* to the *choice* of remaining young forever that singularly belongs to Peter Pan. Roger Lancelyn Green, pirate performer in a few seasons of *Peter Pan* and friend to Peter and Nico Davies, phrases this transformation best when he says:

> It is said that every one of us has a novel in him: working consciously Barrie wrote his novel *Sentimental Tommy* and its second volume *Tommy and Grizel*. Writing with his eye on the Davies boys Barrie drew unconsciously from his own innermost soul far more truly and spontaneously than he intended—and in doing so captured, for such is the way of genius, a reflection of something deeper and more universal than he knew (2).

That universality Green speaks of is the desire that exists in all of us, however small, of remaining young and carefree forever. Green implies that it was Barrie's relationship to the Llewelyn Davies boys that brought him to recognize the trait that most isolated him in the past, the desire to remain forever a child, existed in others as well, though on a smaller scale. Barrie's connection with the Llewelyn Davies family destroyed his feelings of isolation and significantly diminished his

self-doubt, bringing about the story that had been a "dream-child" of his for years (Birkin 104).

Barrie's relationship with the Davies boys prompted not only the story of Peter Pan but Barrie's creation of his authorial voice, which combines his "'cynical'" humor and his complete understanding of simple, small beauties of childhood (Birkin 16). Typically, these two modes would be viewed as contrary to one another if implemented by another author, but Barrie could completely weave the two together so that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other. One of the moments this is best seen is at the beginning of *Peter and Wendy*. To begin the novel, Barrie describes when Wendy first understood that she would one day grow up. He describes a beautiful scene first through the perspective of young Wendy as she digs in a garden and brings, out of the goodness of her little heart, a flower in to please her mother, who remarks "'Oh, why can't you remain like this forever!'" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 7). It is then that Wendy understands she must grow up, and Barrie, from the perspective of the narrator remarks, "you always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end" (7). The biting quality of that phrase does not diminish the first lovely scene, but instead adds a dimension of irony or doubleness to it. Through the writing of *Peter Pan* and *Peter and Wendy*, Barrie exists simultaneously in the world of the child, understanding their world through their point of view, and as the adult narrator, commenting on the action for his audience.

III. Male and Female Roles in *Peter Pan*

In *Peter Pan,* Barrie perpetuates accepted cultural norms of early twentieth century England through his interpretation of the male and female

roles. These interpretations are first glimpsed through his views of Arthur and Sylvia and later forwarded through the lens of gender roles during warfare. Barrie held very distinct and separate views of the position of mother and father in an English household. The father, like Arthur Llewelyn Davies, was the practical one and the enforcer of the rules, while the mother made the home a beautiful and loving place for one to grow up in. These distinctions are shown in the juxtaposition between Mr. and Mrs. Darling. The domestic father character that Mr. Darling represents was someone no young reader would want to be, and whom no child would look up to. Mr. Darling was not a concrete replication of Arthur Llewelyn Davies, but existed instead as Barrie's representation of the middle class domesticated, civilized adult man with a professional career. However, this adult man is incompetent, pompous, angers easily, and possesses the worst qualities of a child. This is best illustrated in the scene in the nursery, when Mr. Darling entices Michael to take his medicine by taking his own at the same time:

> MICHAEL. Father's a cowardly custard.
> MR. DARLING. So are you a cowardly custard
> MICHAEL. I am not frightened.
> MR. DARLING. Neither am I frightened.
> MICHAEL. Well, then take it.
> MR. DARLING. Well, then you take it
> WENDY. Why not take it at the same time…one-two-three (*Michael partakes, but Mr. Darling resorts to hanky-panky*)…oh Father!
> MR. DARLING *(who has been hiding the glass behind him).* What do you mean by 'oh father'? Stop that row, Michael. I meant to take mine but I—missed it. (Barrie *Peter Pan* 25-26).

In this dialogue, it becomes difficult to distinguish who is the child and who is the adult. According to Linda Robertson, Mr. Darling represents "the stifling version of masculinity performed by the professional classes in the name of

civilized domesticity" (64). Through his running of the household, audience members were meant to understand why the Darling children would choose to leave the grown-up world he represented for the sake of youth and adventure. The claustrophobic atmospheres of career and home stunted Mr. Darling, and he presented a form of "half-man" (Robertson 63). True masculinity was found through adventure, not from being trapped in domestic life. It is here that one sees the first example of war propaganda. If Mr. Darling represented the future if one stayed at home to become a "responsible" adult, better to die in warfare, young and experiencing adventure. Mrs. Darling represented the model early twentieth century English mother—someone who desired only to care for her children. Mr. Darling represented someone one did not want to grow up to be.

IV. The "Angel in the House"

Barrie greatly idolized women and especially the woman's role in the household, which is shown through his description of Mrs. Darling. In both the play and the novel, women are venerated, but the novel provides more detail on the subject. When Wendy is shot down from the sky and is later found alive but weak, the Lost Boys and Peter decide to build her a house around her to protect her from the elements. In the midst of their preparation, John and Michael arrive, questioning why so much fuss is being made over their sister: "'For Wendy?' John said, aghast. 'Why, she is only a girl!' 'That,' explained Curly, 'is why we are her servants'" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 63). Even when Peter originally arrives at the nursery, he tempts Wendy to leave with him by complementing her sex: "'Wendy, one girl is worth more than twenty boys'" (27). "'Oh no; girls, you know, are much too clever to fall out of their prams'" (30). In

Mrs. Darling's absence, Wendy is transformed into the little mother figure, caring for all of these mother-less children and completing domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and mending clothing. There is tension present in Barrie's view of the female mother figure: on the one hand, Barrie creates characters in the novel that revere women, but on the other hand, to fulfill this role the woman must be kept in the household, separate from the adventures of her male counterparts. This tension is due to Barrie's own veneration of his mother, who existed as an "angel in the house" during his childhood, caring for him and his four sisters, making their home beautiful, and recounting romantic stories of her Scottish past, inspiring an "enthusiasm for literature" in the young Barrie (Birkin 6).

Barrie's mother, Margaret Ogilvy, in addition to Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, was instrumental to Barrie's development of the character of Wendy. Wendy exists as a tribute to Margaret Ogilvy and as a way for Barrie to connect the present to the past Victorian ideal of the "angel in the house." When Barrie was young, he was fascinated by stories his mother would recount to him of her childhood: "she was eight when her mother's death made her mistress of the house and mother to her little brother, and from that time she scrubbed and mended and baked and sewed…then rushed out in a fit of childishness to play dumps or palaulays with others of her age" (Birkin 6). Andrew Birkin argues in *J.M. Barrie and The Lost Boys: The Love Story that Gave Birth to Peter Pan*, that Barrie's "lifelong quest for the Land of Lost Content…was no nostalgic desire to return to his own boyhood. It was, rather, a craving to experience the childhood of Margaret Ogilvy" (38). He created an idealized picture of his mother

as a child (and perhaps as an adult as well) that fit into the Victorian model of the "Angel of the House." He took that same ideal in miniature form and applied it to Wendy.

Barrie's desire to immortalize his mother through Wendy may have been in response to a traumatic event in his childhood. When Barrie, the youngest of the family's three sons, was only six years old, his thirteen-year-old brother David died in a tragic ice skating accident. The incident was catastrophic beyond belief to Barrie's mother Margaret. She took to her bed for weeks and never truly recovered from the event. In order to help his mother recover, Barrie took it upon himself to emulate his brother David to ease Margaret's pain. He describes '"an intense desire…to become so like him that even my mother should not see the difference'" (Birkin 5). He attempted to practice David's whistle, for "'he had such a cheery way of whistling…it had always brightened her at her work to hear him whistling,'" and he even wore David's own clothes (Birkin 5). David's premature death undoubtedly presented a preliminary inspiration for Peter Pan, for Barrie at age six knew that "Margaret Ogilvy drew a measure of comfort from the notion that David, in dying a boy, would remain a boy forever," but the incident also signified Barrie's undying devotion to his mother and his respect for Margaret as she eventually pulled herself enough out of this tragedy to continue to mother the rest of her children.

V. The "Feminine" Art of Storytelling

When Barrie was young, as explained previously, Margaret Ogilvy would recount many stories of her childhood in Scotland. Barrie admired his mother's gift for storytelling and soaked up all the romantic tales, or Idylls, that fired his

imagination. In fact, it was Margaret herself who inspired Barrie to become a writer, for one day when Barrie was upset when he had exhausted the contents of the penny library, Margaret asked him "'why should [he] not write the tales [him]self'" (Birkin 7). Barrie expressed the desire to one day be able to "weave sufficiently well," meaning to tell stories well enough to please his mother (Routh 63). Barrie connects what he considers the feminine perfected art of storytelling, for he had only experienced stories at his mother's knee, to that of sewing or weaving, another traditionally feminine art. This connection is brought out in the play and novel in the scene where Peter meets Wendy and she sews his shadow back on for him. In this scene, we learn that Peter comes to the window "to listen to the stories" Mrs. Darling tells her children, an art she has passed down from herself to Wendy (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 33). It is Wendy's ability to tell stories that originally tempts Peter to bring her to Neverland, for it is something that he and the lost boys, being all, of course, boys, lack.

Chris Routh, in "'Man for the Sword and for the Needle She': Illustrations of Wendy's Role in J.M. Barrie's Peter and Wendy" discusses the power of the storytelling as a feminine art. He argues that female storytellers singularly hold the power to "reveal secret truths about the culture" (63). For example, in Act IV of the play, Wendy weaves a story about Mr. and Mrs. Darling being dreadfully unhappy about the empty beds of the children who had flown away. Before she told this story, her brothers and the lost boys had been content to live in Neverland forever, but after she recounts her story of the distressed parents and the faithful love of the mother who would "always leave the window open for her progeny to fly back by," the boys are convinced to come back home (Barrie 66).

Wendy, unlike Peter and the rest of the boys, regarded the Neverland as only a "diversion" from the reality of home in England and of growing up (Routh 70). In this way, she is the only character who can both accept and realize the truth. The power of Wendy's storytelling leads the other boys, save Peter of course, to realize that they must go back.

If both Routh and Barrie classify storytelling and as a "feminine art," and if the power of storytelling is one rooted in the tradition of the culture, then it can be inferred that, as female storytellers, Mrs. Darling and Wendy have the responsibility of keeping the ideals of imperial Britain alive. Routh suggests that Mrs. Darling and Wendy are "one and the same," meaning that Wendy was Mrs. Darling in miniature and would effectively turn into her when she reached adulthood. He argues that this can be proven in the additional scene "When Wendy Grew Up" that was only performed once in Barrie's lifetime (61). Routh cites critic Penelope Scambly Scott

> "Just as Mrs. Darling has a romantic mind, 'like the tiny boxes, one within the other, that come from the puzzling East, however many you discover, there is always one more,' so, too, the generations of mothers are self-contained and perpetual. Reinforcing this notion, Barrie added the last section *When Wendy grew up,* which reports the endless chain and succession of mothers. (p. 25)" (Routh 61).

Just as Mrs. Darling passes down her talents of sewing from herself to Wendy, Wendy does to her daughter, Jane, who "loved to hear [stories] of Peter, and [had her mother tell] her all she could remember in the very nursery from which the famous flight had taken place" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 153). In this way, stories of the past and of the particular culture are passed down through the female line. By passing down these stories, the women become the keepers of "secret truths

about the culture," and by holding these "truths," women become symbolic of the past of a nation and an avenue to remember that past (Routh 63). This idea is especially crucial to begin understanding the connection between *Peter Pan* and World War One. The women in the play and the novel become, just as English women of the early twentieth century did, representations of "nativeness" in a nation that is losing its grip on colonialism. The women who are keepers of the past in oral tradition become carriers of past values and all that the golden age of British imperialism represents. Mrs. Darling and Wendy stand as representations of the "angel of the house," or the angelic female caretakers who would keep the home beautiful, running smoothly, and, most importantly, tied to control that was quickly disappearing. While the men went off to fight their "great war" it was the woman's duty to keep everything in the house "just so" and ready for their return, just as both Mrs. Darling and Wendy keep the window ajar for the "troops" to come back home after their adventures in Neverland.

In addition to the image of the window left open to let the children, or in this case the absent adventurers/warriors, back to the idyllic domestic world they had left, the idea of the Victorian English "angel of the house" presents itself in Wendy while she is in Neverland. There, Wendy takes on the role of women in the empire; she brings civilization to a savage place. She is not only a model of Barrie's own mother and an "angel in the house," but a model of women in the empire, who were displaced from England to savage lands in order to "civilize" the natives of those lands. Wendy is brought to the Neverland for one reason only: to become a mother figure for Peter and the Lost Boys. Peter entices her to come by first flattering her sex and then gaining her pity by saying "we are rather

lonely. You see, Wendy, we have no female companionship" (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 32). Peter wishes her be their little mother figure, to tell them stories, mend their pockets for them, and care for them as if they were her own children. According to Linda Robertson:

> To say that Peter Pan reflects the dominant idealizations of Edwardian gender roles and fantasies of adventure does not detract from the unique, delightful, and bittersweet charm of the play; rather it contextualizes it in the cultural matrix and demonstrates the creativity Barrie brought to these pervasive social values" (66).

By casting Wendy as the "little mother" figure, a true model based on his own mother, Barrie is perpetuating the values of pre- and post-World War I England. Before the war, women from the empire were shipped out to bring civilization to "savage" places, effectively implanting British values in an uncivilized land. After the war, the women were meant to be the homemakers and preservers of British values in the home space. Wendy performs both of these acts in Neverland; she brings the Lost Boys, or the "savages," stories of England, implements traditional English gender roles in the uncivilized land by having the boys call her "mother" and Peter "father," provides a feminine presence to care for the Lost Boys and Peter while they have adventures, and makes their home beautiful for when they return. Wendy effectively performs both the roles of women in the conquering empire and women in the homeland during the war.

When Wendy lives with Peter and the Lost Boys in their home under the ground, she cleans, does the washing and mending, and makes the home more beautiful. She works very hard when Peter is out adventuring, making things ready for father's return and commanding the run of the household just as a good early twentieth century English mother should do in the father's absence. While

Peter and the Lost Boys battle pirates or redskins or have adventures, Wendy remains at home and seems quite content to do so, for she does not protest. She would much rather play at family than play at battle. Through Wendy's characterization, Barrie perpetuates popular ideas of the male and female roles of the early twentieth century: it was the man's position to fight and the women's position to preserve the home space for when they came back. The children are in Neverland playing at a small-scale depiction of actual life in England during wartime.

VI. "Great War," Great Adventure

When J.M. Barrie began writing *Peter Pan* at the dawn of the twentieth century, he would go on to re-work, rewrite, and add to the story for the next quarter century during a time of tremendous cultural unrest and political change. In 1904 when the play was first performed, it reached cult-like status almost immediately, attracting "a hard-core following of matinee fanatics who occupied the front row of the stalls to hurl thimbles at Peter and abuse at Hook" (Birkin 118). Children's connection with Peter is unsurprising, for by bringing Peter to life Barrie had created "the first of the preteen heroes: girls wanted to mother him, boys wanted to fight by his side" (Birkin 118). This idea of girls desiring to mother him and boys yearning to fight with him is key to understanding the way that literature shaped culture in the pre- and post-World War I England, for the propagation of *Peter Pan* on the stage and in literary form contributed to young men's desire to give up their lives to "the big adventure" the Great War promised.

The widespread belief during this time was that the "Great War" would be the war to end all wars. The glorious adventure of warfare, that would provide

young men with freedom and a chance to prove themselves "men," would also end the possibility of fighting in combat ever again, ushering in a time of peace. This common belief was due to the nostalgia of the Edwardian period, a period that had "a timeless quality, a sense of eternal strength and virtues" (Adams 85). Sir Harold Macmillan writes in the forward to *An Edwardian Summer,* "it was 'our fond belief that our world, no doubt with continual if small changes for the better, would last forever'" (Adams 85). The war would act as a way to preserve English values and improve cultures in the greater world. It was, in effect, a further colonization technique, but one that was believed the provide peace and glory for the fighting men. It is important to note that the Western world's understanding of the war in 1914 was vastly different than our retrospective understanding today. Paul Fussell, in *The Great War and Modern Memory*, explains the differing values of the early twentieth century:

> The Great War took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where values appeared stable and where the meaning of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant. It was not until eleven years after the war that Hemingway could declare in *A Farewell to Arms* that "abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates." In the summer of 1914 no one would have understood what on earth he was talking about (Fussell 21).

Security was present in joining the war effort. It was the correct, just, and moral route to pursue, and it would be a glorious event that would end quickly. The war was greatly supported on all fronts and was universally understood to be "a cleansing experience, good for a nation's physical and spiritual health" (Adams 8). It was viewed as a solution to worldwide political issues by transferring English values to educate the opposition, both by example and by being

victorious. With England's adversaries being painted the way that they were, it was easy to see why prospective soldiers believed they had justice on their side:

> "We" are all here on this side; "the enemy" is over there. "We" are individuals with names and personal identities; "he" is a mere collective entity. We are visible; he is invisible. We are normal; he is grotesque. Our appurtenances are natural; his, bizarre. He is not as good as we are…he threatens us and must be destroyed, or, if not destroyed, contained and disarmed. Or at least patronized (Fussell 75).

England's adversaries were painted much like the villains in children's stories; it was a simple game of good guy versus bad guy. The comparison was not unlike Barrie's Lost Boys and Pirates, the divisions as simple and concrete as good and evil.

Barrie himself agreed that the Great War would bring worldwide peace and English glory, and he helped to spread the propagated version of warfare, as "the big adventure." Before his newly adopted sons, George, Jack, and Peter, departed from training to fight in the war, Barrie travelled to the United States with proposed speeches to convince the American public to join the war effort. Travelling so far from home was a very rare occurrence for Barrie, who normally liked to stay out of the public eye and who had not travelled to America in about fourteen years. The idea of the Great War certainly meant a great deal to him if he was willing to leave the comfort of England and subject himself to public events. He would have undoubtedly influenced many, for *Peter Pan* had reached a cult-like status in America that rivaled its reception in England. However, the British government cancelled his plans, because they did not want to be convicted of "overtly attempting to influence American neutrality" (Robertson 59). Despite the government-ordered cancellation, Barrie cared enough about promoting the war

and convincing powerful American leaders to join the effort that he found a loophole in the government's orders: he stayed at the home of Theodore Roosevelt during his time in America, discussing Roosevelt's sons and Barrie's wards and the high hopes they had for them while also exploring ideas found in Roosevelt's later collection of articles (*The Great Adventure*) that "celebrated the romance, if not desirability of, dying in warfare" (Robertson 60).

The possibility of death, that his beloved adopted sons may lose their lives during the war seemed, at the start, as impossible to Barrie as it did for the young men who believed themselves to be immortal. As Fussell states, citing A.J.P. Taylor, "'there had been no war between the Great Powers since 1871. No man in the prime of life knew what war was like. All imagined that it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided'" (21). All believed that they knew what to expect, for they had nothing to compare it to, and glory appeared inevitable. Barrie seemed to be as excited about the possibility of adventure as his young wards, and he even expressed the expected national pride for his boys. He writes about George, Jack, and Peter in a letter to his good friend, Mrs. Hugh Davis, before they are sent away to fight, saying, "'I believe they are going to be as right as rain…I am probably going to America on Saturday: we must all try to do something'" (Birkin 224). Barrie in this statement not only expresses his belief that the boys will return unscathed after their brush with adventure, but expresses his own desire to be of use in some way, or perhaps his own desire for adventure. Barrie is a huge supporter of the war effort before fighting even begins for the Davies boys. It is as if he possesses the childlike idea that the war will play out similarly to Peter's major adventures. It is not until the boys depart from

training to the battleground that a shift in both Barrie and the three Davies boys occurs, which mirrors the larger shift in England and America in the face of the "Great War."

Peter Davies, who was in training with George at Sheerness, writes in his *Morgue* of the change in George's usually charming and carefree nature before he departed for battle. While silently changing in their tent one night after training, George broke the long silence by saying, "'well, young Peter, for the first time in our lives we're up against something really serious, **** me if we aren't'" (Birkin 228). Peter later writes that George, with his humor, liveliness, and "'bloom of youth'" serves better than anyone else "'as the flower and type of that doomed generation'" (Birkin 228). Just as George and Peter's perception of the war was changing from that of adventure to that of death, so was Barrie's. The change Barrie undergoes is best seen in the juxtaposition between two quotations. Barrie's transformation directly mirrors the shift the whole culture is experiencing at this time. In the first quotation, Barrie, in an interview while he was in America, states:

> It's funny…that the real Peter Pan—I called him that—is off to the war now. He grew tired of the stories I told him, and his younger brothers became interested. It was such fun telling those two about themselves. I would say, "Then you came along and killed the pirate" and they would accept every word as the truth (Birkin 225).

In the second, later quote, from one of his letters to George, Barrie writes:

> It is very strange to me to read of your being at your musketry practice, for it seems to me but the other day your mother was taking bows and arrows out of your hands and pressing on me the danger of giving you penny pistols…there is certainly some gain—a stirring of manhood, but at a terrible cost (Birkin 228).

In the first quotation, Barrie connects the world of warfare directly to the world he had created with the Davies boys in their youth. To him, they are still those children and the war is still representative of a larger version of the adventures they had when they were younger, and the German soldiers are merely a personification of another pirate to fight. In the second, the worlds of fantasy and reality are severed. Barrie comes to the realization, just as George and Peter do, that the great war is not a continuation of their childhood games; great risk is involved, and it is much more probable that they would suffer the "terrible cost" that Barrie alludes to and not the glory that the "fictional" Peter Pan experiences in the play, the novel, and in their childhood games.

VII. "Great War," Great Loss

In 1915 the possibility of loss became all too real to Barrie and the Llewelyn Davies boys. George Llewelyn Davies was killed in battle in the early hours of March fifth. According to Lord Tennyson's son, Aubrey, who wrote to Peter of George's death, George "'had a sort of premonition he was going to be killed & said he hoped they would…bury him outside his own trench, & that he considered it was the finest death one could die'" (Birkin 243). George exemplified honor in his death and epitomized Wendy's wish when she speaks for all English women by saying "I feel that I have a message from your real mothers and it is this: 'we hope our sons will die like English gentlemen'" (Barrie *Peter Pan* 76). Adams concurs with this idea, stating, "dying well was a lesson boys heard a lot at the turn of the century" (88). George epitomized honor, good form, and the "stiff upper lip [that] was an admired way to meet death", but this ideology was no longer enough to sustain Barrie (Adams 85). According to Peter

Davies, George's death caused Barrie to be "'shaken to the core'" (Birkin 244). It was a death from which he never recovered. However, George would not be the only loved one that Barrie would lose to the war.

On May 1, 1915, famed theatrical producer and manager Charles Frohman boarded the *Lusitania* for a journey across the Atlantic from New York to Liverpool, a journey he would never complete. On May 7th the *Lusitania* was struck by a torpedo from a German U-boat and sunk approximately eighteen minutes after the initial impact (Robertson 50). As the first green, wild waves prepared to consume the boat's passengers, Charles Frohman, after giving his life jacket to a female passenger, spoke his final words, which paraphrased the legendary quote of the play he brought to life a mere decade before: "'why fear death? It is the greatest adventure of life'" (Robertson 50). Frohman undoubtedly had Peter Pan in mind when he uttered his final words, for both his quote and his situation mirror Peter's in act three of the play that "went straight to his heart" when he initially read it in 1904 (Birkin 105). In act three of *Peter Pan,* Peter and Wendy are in a perilous situation. Wounded and unable to fly, they are stranded on Marooner's Rock, only able to watch the threatening waters come closer to them, like Frohman on the *Lusitania*. Peter, left alone after heroically offering to Wendy the only escape that came to them in the form of a kite, utters his infamous line, "to die will be an awfully big adventure" (Barrie *Peter Pan* 59). Peter greets the possibility of death as a friend, an equal, an opportunity, and, most importantly, a choice. It is this quote and the implications of it that shaped the perception of warfare, death, and heroic sacrifice for a higher ideal.

VIII. Post-War *Peter Pan*

The war effort appropriated *Peter Pan* in a variety of ways. Prior to the war, Peter Pan signified eternal boyhood, but with the advent of the war he signified "the seductive lure of combat as 'the great adventure', promising death for a glorious cause as preferable to the prosaic indignities of adulthood and aging" (Robertson 51). Facing death in warfare became "the big adventure" that Peter spoke of, and prewar cultural definitions connected *Peter Pan* to themes of manliness and heroism. The British used the sinking of the *Lusitania,* and the deaths of American passengers such as Charles Frohman, as propaganda to get the United States, which was at that point a neutral country, to join the war effort (Robertson 59).

Frohman's story of great sacrifice and courage in the face of death was told, and tributes to him "appealed to the idealized image of a gentleman: gallant, self-sacrificing, fearless, competitive, and welcoming Death as but one more test of virtue and manhood" (Robertson 56). Frohman's last words were echoed in war propaganda, most notably in Theodore Roosevelt's (who was good friends with Barrie) *The Great Adventure,* which he wrote post-World War I to commemorate the American soldiers who had sacrificed their lives to a greater cause. According to Linda Robertson, Frohman's last words, *Peter Pan,* and the Great War are undisputedly linked, for "the public would not have known Peter Pan as a beloved icon of naïve courage without the vision directed and propagated by Frohman; conversely, Frohman's last words might have had only a short life without the English government's commitment that these words would ring in the public's—especially the American public's—ears" (59).

Barrie, however, after the deaths of George and of his great friend Charles Frohman, was through with propagating the war. Barrie became tormented with nightmares that he recounts in his journal (Birkin 252-253) that bear a striking resemblance to Peter Pan's as described not in the 1904 play but in the 1911 novel:

> Sometimes, though not often, he had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of other boys. For hours he could not be separated from these dreams, though he wailed piteously in them. They had to do, I think, with the riddle of his existence (Barrie *Peter Pan* 115).

For Peter, this "riddle of his existence" refers to his perpetual youth and freedom but lack of emotional human contact and love, but for Barrie it could signify his incomprehension of a world where he was able to remain alive while his young ward and dear friend were dead. Barrie undoubtedly felt some sense of responsibility for the deaths of his adopted son and of his friend, for he had fed the Llewelyn Davies boys stories of great adventure from their early childhood that would later provoke them to seek real adventure and glory in the real world, and it had been because of him that Frohman had boarded the *Lusitania* from America to England, for "Barrie begged him to come earlier in the hope that he might have ideas on how to salvage *Rosy Rapture*", Barrie's current play (Birkin 247). Barrie's response to the war is both typical and atypical in early twentieth century England, for though the cultural grief held by many was extremely traumatic and though "the term Lost Generation conjures an image of sad-eyed veterans denouncing war and urging peace upon future generations," the reality is that England's opinion of warfare was much "more complex" (Adams 113). Though many personal accounts of post-WWI loss throughout history match

Barrie's, C.C. Adams asserts, in *The Great Adventure*, that in reality "much feeling in Britain and America remained as positive about the value of war after 1914-1918 as it had been before" (113). Although some anti-war pamphlets and other works were published during this time, many cultural "attitudes were essentially unchanged" (Adams 113). However, the war was still a heavily loaded topic, especially for one to experience during a theatrical performance, which explains Barrie's later amendment to *Peter Pan*.

The power of Barrie's grief, the cultural perception of *Peter Pan,* and the impact of Frohman's final quote is best indicated during the Christmastime revival of *Peter Pan* in December, 1915, the second Christmas of the war; Barrie and other theatrical contemporaries involved in the production "decided to drop the Lagoon scene: partly for economy, partly because Peter's curtain line, 'To die will be an awfully big adventure', was felt to be somewhat inappropriate under the circumstances" (Birkin 252). This portion of the story was also omitted from children's classrooms, labeled as too heavily-loaded a topic to be taught to a generation of children that may have lost brothers, fathers, or other male relatives in the war (Robertson 71). *Peter Pan* had become a symbol for something that was all too real for both Barrie and theatregoers during the war—of a world where boys go off seeking adventure only to remain forever young by meeting their early deaths.

Though J.M. Barrie's intensely autobiographical story of a young boy who would not grow up began as a deeply personal fantasy that connects to his veneration of the past, it became a "floating signifier" for post-war England that presented a suspension of time in order to underlie the cultural grief of a nation

that was losing its empire as fast as it was losing its boys to death in the trenches (Robertson 50). What began as a story that vastly appealed to audiences who acknowledged their hidden desires to remain youthful and, as Barrie describes, "gay and innocent and heartless" forever became more than just a representation of their childhood pasts, but a yearning for the past of a powerful empire before the loss that accompanied the war (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 159). Robertson describes this transformation best by saying:

> The gentle fantasy of the little boy who refused to grow up now becomes praise for young men who will not live past twenty. A fairy tale about being able to fly by thinking happy thoughts and laughing under a sprinkling of fairy dust becomes the military reality of learning to fly a plane fueled by gasoline into the skies, and, if fate calls for it, going down in flames (67).

By writing *Peter Pan* in 1904 and *Peter and Wendy* in 1911, J.M. Barrie was not only perpetuating cultural values of the early twentieth century but also reconditioning them. The story may also act as a healing balm for a nation, or a way to retreat back into fantasy when the horror of the real world becomes too much to bear. It certainly became that for Barrie. He came to realize that killing belongs in the fantasy world, where the pirates are just terrifying enough to make the fight thrilling and the enemy disappears when one is safe with their fellow lost boys. Robertson discusses Barrie's transformed point of view about warfare after losing George Llewelyn Davies and Charles Frohman, saying that,

> Barrie, in his wisdom, presents the case that the make-believe world of fighting and dying has to remain just that: the killing is only imaginary, one is always a hero, and one never dies. That distinction between the imaginary world of childhood and the dangers of acting it out in the real world must have enforced itself upon Barrie's imagination (71).

Barrie's retreat into the fantasy world he had created is understandable, as is the retreat of so many readers and audience members who would go on to appreciate

the story of "the boy who wouldn't grow up" during and after wartime. For when one's country is losing more than half of one's young men, it is therapeutic in a way to picture them, as Margaret Ogilvy pictured her young son David and as Barrie pictured George, as young boys forever, preserved in a fantasy world where they would never grow old and have all the adventures their hearts desire.

IX. Binaries Emerge

In the examination of Barrie's *Peter Pan* during the first two decades of its premiere, it is found that both the novel and play establish multiple binaries that lend both the story and the character of Peter Pan liminality that speaks to real world tensions of the early twentieth century. Some notable examples of these binaries are Barrie's authorial voice, which moves between the sentimental and the sardonic, the male and female roles in early twentieth century English households as presented through the example of Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies and forwarded to the Darling family, which the character of Peter rejects, the thin line between life and death in warfare as shown through Barrie's experiences with George Llewelyn Davies and Charles Frohman, and the fantasy/reality perception of warfare that establishes itself in the contrast between childhood adventure of stories like *Peter Pan* and the reality of a real world where young men are dying. The binaries that Barrie, whether consciously or unconsciously, established were used by readers to process a rapidly changing world, leading to the novel and play's immediate cult-like status in the United Kingdom and America. In fact, one could even say that the transforming Western world of the early twentieth century existed, like the narrative's hero, between multiple binaries, most notably past and future.

Peter Pan himself presented a very complicated character for interpreters of the story to process in later versions of the story, especially in the realms of his existence between fantasy/reality and male/female. Barrie's Pan eludes such classification, particularly in the realm of gender because for more than half a century numerous actresses played Peter on the stage as the play was done every year in England during Christmas. This issue of gender ambiguity becomes especially problematic in the mid-twentieth century as Peter made his way from the novel and the stage to film, and Walt Disney set out to create his own "family entertainment" approved version of the story.

Chapter Two
Conditioned Cultural Understanding of the Mid-Century: Building a "New" Peter Pan

I. "Peter Breaks Through" in a New Medium

In 1918, less than two decades after the original premiere of *Peter Pan*'s stage performance, J.M. Barrie began to toy with the idea of creating a film version of the play, under the astute impression that the film medium could take Pan to new heights, performing feats that would be impossible for a staged version. Film was quickly becoming the new medium for popular culture in the early twentieth century, and it seemed feasible to bring *Peter Pan,* which had gained fast fame and a cult following in the United Kingdom and America, from the stage to the screen. Though Barrie refused an incredible offer of £20,000 for the rights for a film version of *Peter Pan* in 1918*,* the offer "set him thinking, and by December 1920 he had himself written and completed a scenario based on the play and the book, but imagined and written expressly for the silent screen" (Lancelyn Green 169). Paramount Pictures bought the rights to a film version in the early 1920's, and Barrie sent them his film scenario, which was described by Mr. Mackail in *Fifty Years of Peter Pan* as

> Fifteen thousand words of the most carefully re-written scenario…with all the subtitles, and a mass of fresh visual detail which to anyone but a film producer and his attendant experts, must surely have seemed like a gift from Heaven. It's authentic, it comes from the one and only source of the saga, who took enormous trouble over it, and never forgot for one moment the special medium for which it was meant. But of course, the producer, and his experts, knew better. They wanted, apparently, to put the play, rather than this deliciously characteristic version of it, on the screen (Lancelyn Green 170).

Though Peter Pan aficionados would argue that Barrie possessed the utmost authority and understanding of the story he had created and would be the best

source to write a film scenario, in the end, producers provided the final decision regarding what the film would entail.

Almost the entirety of Barrie's proposed scenario was rejected for the film. The producers knew what had been commercially successful—the play—and were determined to recreate that success. Barrie was incredibly disappointed, stating that "it is only repeating what is done on the stage…and the only reason for a film should be that it does the things the stage can't do", but he need not have feared, for it was only the first in a long line of film interpretations of *Peter Pan* (Lancelyn Green 170). These new film interpretations would culturally reproduce and reconstruct the story to aid in commercial success by perpetuating new cultural values, often by performing feats that the stage could not. In this chapter, I will examine [two] film scenario[s] that I believe illustrate the major cultural changes made to *Peter Pan* in the mid-twentieth century, Disney's *Peter Pan* *[*and NBC's TV Movie *Peter Pan*, starring Mary Martin]. [Both film scenarios] illustrate multiple binary transformations from the original text, showing that Peter Pan was remade in the mid-century in order to remain culturally relevant.

II. Mary Martin's *Peter Pan*

This chapter will focus predominately on Disney's *Peter Pan* of 1953, but during the same year, a Peter Pan production of a very different style that is equally, if not more so, recognizable to contemporary viewers was in development. In 1954, Mary Martin's musical *Peter Pan* hit the Broadway stage. It would go on to a very successful run that led to a live televised run on NBC in 1955, featuring the same cast. The musical itself was created especially for Martin, and director/choreographer Jerome Robbins "had the difficult task of

maintaining the innocence of the source while also creating a production that was a proper vehicle for its star" (Hanson 223). Robbins wanted to maintain the show's connection to Barrie's story, but much of the narrative had to be abridged to allow time for the musical numbers, including Peter's iconic "to die will be an awfully big adventure" scene (Hanson 224). The original composer and lyricist, Moose Charlap and Carolyn Leigh, respectively, desired to connect the original songs to Barrie's narrative as best they could, but often their songs did not fit with what was expected of a Broadway musical. An example of this was the song "When I Went Home," composed for Martin to sing as she recounts the story of Peter's return to his mother's house to find that his mother had barred the window and had another baby in his place. Though Sondra Leigh, the actress who portrayed Tiger Lily, insisted that it was "one of the most beautiful songs I have ever heard in my life…it is the story of *Peter Pan,*" it was cut because

> Mary Martin told Moose Charlap that the song was just too sad. It fits the story of *The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* so well that one would think that Barrie had written all of it, but Mary's point remains valid. For a musical of the 1950's that was being aimed specifically for children at an age when their chief anxiety is over separation from their parents, the song was not appropriate (Hanson 233).

Though, in that respect, the musical adhered to guidelines of what would be popular in the 1950 Broadway scene, in other ways it was very progressive for the era. While Disney's primary objective, which I will explain later in greater detail, was to define the ambiguous binaries that Barrie establishes in his original texts, Mary Martin's musical arguably embraced the ambiguities, especially in respect to gender.

Stacy Wolf in her article "'Never Gonna Be A Man/Catch Me If You Can/I Won't Grow Up': A Lesbian Account Of Mary Martin As Peter Pan" states that "Peter Pan, the play for which Martin is most commonly recognized, occupies a curious (queer?) place in the genre of Broadway musicals" (496). Wolf, similar to a select group of critics, argues that Martin presented a lesbian characterization of Peter Pan. Whether that position has merit or not, many queer aspects are present both in her performance and the production itself. Theresa Jones in "Peter Pan and Me (or How I Learned to Fly)" explains the queerness of Martin's performance by comparing it to other popular television representations of femininity. In this example, she contrasts Martin's Pan to Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz:*

> However, Peter Pan— a boy who looks like a girl played by a girl who looks like a boy— not only embodied adventure but also, what Dorothy couldn't, liberation for Midwestern girls who didn't necessarily agree with the party line "there's no place like home," that drab and familiar space of prescribed gender roles, rigid sexual identities, and oppressive social norms. What the televised performances of Peter Pan offered to mid-twentieth century American audiences was the fantasy of flying by the nets of heteronormativity…Mary Martin brought the ultimate performance of gender fluidity in all of its joyous flamboyance, playful confusion, and political/cultural critique right into our living rooms. From the studied androgyny of a female actor playing a male character, she could instantly transform into a seductive siren luring Captain Hook into the forest; a middle-class husband smoking a pipe and reading a newspaper next to Wendy; and a sexually precocious boy dancing with Tiger Lily. Now, here truly was a radical and enabling film, which is all about, according to Marjorie Garber, transgression "without guilt, pain, penalty, conflict, or cost" (244).

Martin's Peter Pan represented a different side of mid-twentieth-century American culture, one that is transgressive in the face of accepted gender roles and constantly in flux. Jones cites the time of Martin's iconic performance as one defined by "an emerging cultural, social, and political rebelliousness of the

American middle class in which prescribed gender roles were challenged, normative sexual identities were resisted, and high camp was appropriated by dominant culture" (245). However, it is not only Martin's characterization alone that presents examples of "cultural rebelliousness," but the portrayal of other lead characters as well.

Cyril Ritchard's performance of the dastardly villain, Captain Hook, transforms the pirate captain into a queer character (or perhaps he merely discovers qualities that are already present). As Stacy Wolf explains,

> Captain Hook is a character constructed within the traditions of the "dame role" in Victorian theatre. Hook begins, then, already as a character in drag. Ritchard's foppish costume, affected British accent, obviously fake mole, and fey gestures create a performance of high camp. The performance resonates especially queerly in relation to Martin's earnest boyishness (503).

Perhaps the clearest example of Hook's (and Peter's) queer characterization occurs in the musical number "Oh, My Mysterious Lady" in which Peter attempts to trick Hook by disguising himself as a lady, singing in falsetto, and attempting to seduce the pirate in a ballet-like dance which reveals the performativity of gender roles. As Wolf clarifies further:

> The gendered layers of character (woman-plays-boy-plays-woman and man-plays-man-playing-woman-plays- woman) do not return each actor to "nature," but rather reveal the utter artifice of gender in the production. The scene is rich, as Hook, played excessively feminine and thus stereotypically "gay" by Ritchard, prances about and calls, "Oh, lovely lady." It seems absurd that Hook would be seduced by a "lovely" or "fair" woman. Hook crosses as heterosexual, the same way that Peter Pan crosses as a woman…this duet reverses gendered-propelled action. Rather than the man appearing to be strong and controlling the woman, Peter's teasing voice (the "woman's" voice) initiates the actions and controls Hook's movements…In the number, Hook's sincerity is contrasted to Peter's play-acting, as Peter shifts roles, voices, and characters. But Ritchard-as-Hook in love with a woman plays as camp because Hook appears so stereotypically fey, and so, in spite of the long and established

> history of performed dame roles, prompts a gay reading. When Martin plays the woman, though, she is restored to a seemingly unlayered, natural version of herself. As a couple, they signify gay man and lesbian, and their antics are contained in the fantasy of the story (505-506).

Thus, the scene, using the transformative atmosphere of the stage, not only argues that gender is performed rather than given, but it also challenges heterosexuality, which was "the very foundation of postwar, middle-class American society" (Jones 259). The scene in itself represents all that was problematic about the play and all that Disney sought to stabilize: Peter Pan as the boyish female hero and Captain Hook as the feminized male villain. These kinds of gender crossovers would not do for a Disney family film that sought to reinforce the place of concrete binary oppositions in a rapidly changing world.

III. The Disney-fication of Pan: Defining the Binaries

In 1953, Walt Disney Studios released their much-awaited *Peter Pan*, a project Disney had intended to develop even before *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was completed. Disney had bought the film rights in 1939, but, due to financial troubles and the taxing production developments of other animation projects, like *Bambi, Pinocchio, Dumbo,* and *Fantasia,* Disney was not able to begin production until 1949 (Hanson 202). In creating the film, Disney was in complete agreement with Barrie's above statement that film should do "the things the stage can't do", saying that animation was the best vehicle for fully realizing Barrie's production:

> I don't believe that what James M. Barrie actually intended ever came out on the stage…if you read the play carefully, following the author's suggestion on interpretation and staging, I think you'll agree. It's almost a perfect vehicle for cartooning. 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 reign to the imagination (Ohmer 151).

Undoubtedly, Disney held the belief that by animating the film for a 1950's audience, he would be bringing new life to the story while also finding the truth in Barrie's original vision, creating a timeless classic. However, through close examination of Disney's film and the changes he made to the story, one finds that Disney's *Peter Pan* is not the timeless classic Disney intended it to be and "not quite in the same league as the other films mentioned [*Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo,* and *Bambi*]" (Hanson 202). It is, in fact, a direct product of its own time, functioning as "a prescriptive tool for reinforcing community norms of gender, female sexuality, and the function of the mother and father in a nuclear family" (Crafton 34). Disney takes the fluid binaries of Barrie's original story between such areas as childhood/adulthood, male/female, and fantasy/reality and makes those binaries rigid and concrete in order to appeal to mid-twentieth century audiences. Contrary to popular belief, the 1950's were a time of great cultural change, and Disney's version of Peter Pan represented a desperate attempt to recall views of the past. As Theresa Jones explains, "in spite of the characterization of the late fifties and early sixties as a placid time in which happy white, middle-class American families mowed lawns and watched television in their suburban homes, it was also a time of great anxiety and profound uneasiness" (244-245). These social and cultural shifts would later "energize the Beat culture, women's liberation, civil rights, and gay liberation [movements that] were already well underway" (Jones 253). Disney's interpretation represents American culture's underlying anxiety in the face of these shifts by

calling for the stability of past ideals. There is no fluidity between binaries, and, arguably, little room for imagination in Disney's interpretation as well as little of Barrie's voice or original story, for "questions about the nature and viability of fantasy, gender roles, and sexual identity are fundamental to the [original] Peter Pan narrative" (Ohmer 157).

IV. Mid-Century Gender Roles—A Retreat Into the Past

It is inconceivable that the media perpetuated socially acceptable gender during the 1950's following World War II. As Victoria Straughn states in "Holly 'Takes' on Domestic Subversion: The Role of Women in Cold War America," at the end of World War II, "wartime propaganda prepared Americans to expect social and economic changes following the war…[and] the need for women to return to their own domestic duties" (31). During the war, women had taken up the jobs temporarily vacated by male soldiers, but upon the men's return, there was a need for women to return to their rightful place in the home and family. The progressive views proclaimed by Rosie the Riveter retreated into the background as post-war America embraced an ideal similar to the "Angel in the house" standard that dominated Victorian England. According to Straughn, it was made very clear that "women were to be 'contained' within the home, and behave attentively toward their children" (31). Shelley Nickles goes on to say in "More Is Better: Mass Consumption, Gender, and Class Identity in Postwar America" that stories advertising modern appliances had to appeal to the domestic mother and that they "featured the kitchen as a place…where working-class women wielded influence in their neighborhoods" (606). The home again

became the proper place for women post-WWII—their appropriate role being mothers and caretakers of the home and family.

V. Creating the *Boy* Who Wouldn't Grow Up

The most crucial issue facing Disney storyboard artists, animators, and writers working on *Pan* was the question of Peter's often unclassifiable gender and sexuality. At the time of Disney's *Peter Pan's* creation, the Disney company was attempting to remake itself. Susan Ohmer explains in "Disney's Peter Pan: Gender, Fantasy, and Industrial Production" that after some financial troubles and an animator's strike in the 1940's "the very meaning of 'Disney' shifted rapidly" in the second half of the century (153). Disney needed a surefire hit to not only turn in a profit, but also to show the "timeless" nature of their films by, in affect, changing with the times. Disney strived to show audiences that no matter the time or the tale, Disney would always have universal appeal. In order to "remake" and modernize itself, Disney formed focus groups, the first of the such groups to be divided by gender so that experts could infer what appealed to men and what pleased women, which they believed were inherently separate. Records of these focus groups show that important "decisions about *Peter Pan's* characters, narrative, and visual style" were made that "reflected changing social norms and shifting expectations of what 'Disney' should be" (Ohmer 153). From the start of their process, it was clear what the underlying problem for both male and female 1940's viewers was: "the uncertain masculinity of the film's central character posed a challenge for Disney animators that shaped their approach to elements involving sexuality and gendered behavior" (Ohmer 153). In order for

the film to have any amount of commercial success, the writers and animators would have "man up" Peter Pan.

The desire to masculinize Peter Pan was problematic, for it often existed in opposition to Disney's goal to create timeless, family entertainment. The animators were conflicted, for while they "wanted to modernize the characters and update the kinds of adventures they had, many…wanted to preserve the "youthful innocence" of the tale they loved" (Ohmer 163). To find solutions to particular characterization qualms, Disney formed focus groups consisting of equal numbers of male and female employees. These conferences were unique because "for the first time in Disney's history…[they] offered women a chance to express their views on a film while it was in progress" (Ohmer 161). The records of these meetings establish one of the first times in history that one can study gender differences in response to a particular film, and they provided valuable information "in a historical period during which ideas about gender were very much in flux" (Ohmer 161). So much in flux, in fact, that "family values kept changing during the time of the production" and the film could be seen as a "restorative effort" to preserve values that were already obsolete when the film premiered (Crafton 34-35).

Disney was torn between its desire to modernize and its need to preserve ideals of the past, for the 1940's were "widely seen at the time as an erosion of the family from within" (Crafton 35). The roles of women were changing; many women had worked during WWII to keep industries running while the men fought and this created widespread cultural discomfort. The role of women could have previously been found purely in the home and the family. Because there was

discomfort and change in the female role, the foundation of the home and family was cracking. The cultural erosion of family values, Disney's reinvention of their image, and Disney's *Peter Pan* dispute are all directly related, for they all represent inherent conflict between the past and future in Western culture. In an attempt to uncover solutions to both their Peter Pan characterization issue and the re-making of their image, Disney formed the male and female focus groups to discover not only what viewers would think of their new film, but to provide insurance that *Peter Pan* would appeal to both men and women.

The writers' first idea to gain both male and female approval was to create a romantic relationship between Wendy and Peter Pan, and to increase the feminine jealousy between Wendy and Tinker Bell. It was an idea built on the belief that the romance would appeal to the women while also taking away any dispute about Peter's sexuality, or lack thereof, from the male viewers. However, their primary idea to create a "romance" story backfired:

> The all-male group worried that "Peter can't be a sissy." The female-involved noncritical group, by contrast, felt that Peter's character was becoming too sexual. One member of the noncritical group wrote: "I had a little dislike of the idea of Wendy being emotional about a 'Clark Gable' type. Seems to me that injects a little disturbance of thought in [the] story line. Couldn't she just like Pan as a playmate or as someone who needed care?" This concern was echoed by the senior animators at later meetings, when the critical group expressed that they had gone too far in making the jealousy between Wendy and Tinker Bell too adult, and Tinker Bell too "voluptuous." (Ohmer 162).

Peter was still "not manly enough" for the male viewers and too overtly sexual for the female viewers. Their childhood story was disappearing, losing all of its "youthful innocence" (Crafton 163). The Disney team needed to take Peter and Wendy's relationship in a different direction. The audiences had enjoyed the

nuclear family structure that framed the beginning of the film with Mr. and Mrs. Darling, so the writers decided to bring that familial quality to the Neverland; Wendy, "no longer a temptress, becomes a nurturing mother figure" to her brothers and the Lost Boys (Ohmer 166). This reinforced post-war ideals of the home and family, while also creating a maternal figure that was meant to "soothe the women in the non-critical audience" (Ohmer 167). To please the men, more action sequences were added. These additions were undoubtedly stereotypical assumptions regarding what would appeal to both genders, and Walt Disney enforced these stereotypes, arguing that

> The males don't go for sentimental things . . . they go more for vigorous action or excitement or big belly laughs or scientific things or mechanics. The females always go for the personalities, the little sentimental things, for the beauty in it and it never fails. All the women love this— the man is bored with it (Ohmer 167).

However, survey results show commonalities between the two genders, for "both groups liked elements of the pirates and Indian characters, and the men began to like Wendy and the themes of mother and home as well" (Ohmer 166). Though their gender division of characters did not pan out exactly as they had assumed, Disney began to recognize the potential for success with both male and female audiences. Nevertheless, an important characterization question still remained: How would they define Wendy's complicated relationship to Peter?

Many early research findings for the film also informed creators that the coveted age-group between eighteen and thirty regarded the idea for the film as "childish," so to amend this "the studio decided it could offset the story's association with childhood by using popular actors and music and by stressing the comic possibilities of *puppy love* between Wendy and Peter" (Ohmer 159 my

emphasis). Wendy's infatuation would be childlike and innocent, similar to one's first "crush." One way to gain the approval of the primary theatre-going age group was to shift the narrative of the story away "from Peter and from Wendy's mother to Wendy" (Crafton 36). Peter, who presented the original characterization problem, was moved from being the subject of the story to a main character that affected the life of the protagonist, Wendy. The focus of the Disney film is Wendy's journey to adulthood and her choice to grow up and remain with her family. According to the initial source analyst for the Disney film, Dorothy Ann Blank, who spoke about character identification from a woman's point of view, "any little girl will envy Wendy for knowing Peter Pan, even though she eventually has to go back home and never see him again" (Crafton 36). Blank also believed that mothering should not be the theme of the film, just as an element of the plot, for the complicated mother—romantic relationship between Peter and Wendy that exists in Barrie's original play was problematic in the Disney concept, and did not masculinize Peter. Disney's Peter did not *need* a mother figure—he just wanted someone around to tell him stories (stories like *Cinderella,* which provided Disney—ever the businessman—an advertising point for his film of the same name that had premiered three years earlier). What Pan needed was not a caretaker, but a source of entertainment. In Blank's early analysis of the original play, one finds the structure of the final film: "Wendy is the protagonist infatuated with Peter, with motherhood as a secondary interest" (Crafton 36). Audience members, particularly children, were meant to follow Wendy's story as if it were their own, moving from childhood to

acceptance of adulthood and the nuclear family structure. However, the question of Peter's masculinity still remained.

To create their new "masculine" Pan, Disney would have to compete with more than half a century of female actresses who had portrayed "the boy who wouldn't grow up" in stage versions of the play. In addition to that, in early London productions of the play girls or young women portrayed all of the Lost Boys. Often, a young actress also played Wendy's brother Michael, and "it was not until 1928 that boys began to play the Lost Boys" (Ohmer 156). Women portrayed nearly all of the male roles in the production. Because Peter Pan has for the most part been played by women, "the play in performance raises provocative questions about gender and sexuality, narrative and desire," for no matter how short the haircut and "'no matter how artfully 'true to life' the boyish gestures, [this performance of] drag fools no one'" (Wolf 508). Even with the strongest powers of suspension of disbelief, audiences always knew that the theatrical Pan was a woman, which caused, for Disney, unwanted gender confusion. From the first storyboard meetings, the senior animators expressed concern that Peter not be "a sissy," equating the character's previous attachment to the feminine as being un-heroic and unlikeable to a contemporary audience (Olmer 174). The binary between male and female would have to be concretely divided. To do this, Disney created a supremely boyish Peter Pan, concerned only with adventuring, and crafted the feminine female characters to exist as foils to him, to adore him, and, often, to fight over him.

Story analyst Dorothy Blank, disturbed by Pan's "'sexual ambiguity,'" provided the founding character description for Disney's new version of Pan,

urging "'we remove forever any doubts about sex, and make our hero all boy—fun, fierce, brave and a little tough'" (Olmer 174). Blank believed that Barrie's work inspired an "'inherent freedom of treatment'" and that it was the Disney writers and animators' responsibility to give people a "'clarification'" of the original story (Crafton 35). Blank's "clarification" included a stricter definition of the binaries between adulthood and childhood, reality and fantasy, and, most importantly, male and female. To masculinize their new Peter Pan, Disney revolutionarily cast a boy as the voice and film model. Disney provided a statement when the film was in development, saying, "it's been traditional for a girl to play the part of Peter on stage, but we're making him a *real* boy, using Bobby Driscoll to supply the voice and bringing the dialog more down to earth" (Crafton 174, my emphasis). Driscoll, Disney's first ever actor under contract, had previously appeared in Disney's *Treasure Island*, a film based on the novel that had been one of Barrie's inspirations for *Peter Pan*, so he presented the ideal option for the film's hero (Hanson 203). Driscoll, who was in his mid-teens when recording for the film, portrayed Pan very differently from Barrie's original play:

> In contrast to Barrie's Peter, who seems too childish and naïve to know the difference between a thimble and a kiss, Disney's Peter would rather move on to the next adventure than dwell on such things. Barrie describes Peter as being made of "autumn leaves and cobwebs," but Disney's character is a young teenage boy with red hair and a voice showing the effects of puberty (Olmer 174).

Disney's Pan understands Wendy's advances, after all, he is not so much a child as a young teenager, but rejects them in favor of boyish exploits, like fighting pirates and leading his band of Lost Boys. This Pan, however, in addition to focusing on when his next adventure will take place, also displays chivalrous

characteristics of the 1940's-50's man. He saves Wendy from falling to her death, providing a lovely "publicity still" to advertise the movie (see figure 1), often takes her arm to guide her or help her to fly, and saves a defenseless Tiger Lily from drowning (Ohmer 170). He performs none of these gestures because he feels romantic feelings for the women, but instead enacts them effortlessly, as if they are merely characteristics of "good form" inherently found in his nature. This choice would go over well with both male and female audiences of the 1950's, when men were taught to be the primary caretakers of women.

Comparing the two "shadow" scenes, or the scene when Wendy first meets Peter, presents a clear contrast between Barrie's Pan and Disney's new hyper-masculine and sentimentality-free "Super Pan" (Crafton 33). In Barrie's novel, *Peter and Wendy*, Peter, who has just caught hold of his shadow, attempts to stick the shadow on with soap from the bathroom. However, when that plan failed, "a shudder passed through Peter, and he sat on the floor and cried" (Barrie *1911* 25). Wendy is awakened by his sobs, sits up in bed, interested, and inquires, "'Boy…why are you crying?'" (Barrie *1911* 25). Peter "who could be exceedingly polite also, having learned the grand manner at fairy ceremonies" rose and bowed beautifully to Wendy, who, pleased, bowed in return to him (Barrie *1911* 25). Still the polite gentleman, Peter then asked Wendy her name, to which she grandly responded "'Wendy Moira Angela Darling'" (Barrie *1911* 25). The name of Peter Pan seemed "comparatively short" alongside her grand introduction, which causes Peter some discomfort (Barrie *1911* 25). To amend his tears, though he claims he "'wasn't crying,'" Wendy offers to sew on his shadow for him, thus beginning her mothering relationship.

Disney's Pan, however, never has to claim he "wasn't crying," for he never cries at all. Instead of being woken by tears, Disney's Wendy is roused by the ruckus Peter creates chasing his crafty shadow around the nursery. Peter is only interested by her presence because he fears that she will steal his shadow, for he quickly hides it behind his back when she awakes. Instead of wasting time with formalities, he continues to try to stick his shadow on with a bar of soap, while Wendy babbles on and on. Peter's face is dumbfounded when confronted by her incessant chatter, and, as he scratches his head in confusion after she has spoken continuously since their meeting, he says, "girls talk too much" (Disney 1953). Wendy, too engrossed in her own dialogue to realize what Peter has said, laughs and agrees that, yes, girls do talk too much, until at the end of her statement she realizes what he had said and looks injured. This little jib against women would have undoubtedly provided a laugh from Disney's viewers, especially the males, who would relate to Peter's desire to go on with his work while Wendy gets in the way by chattering continuously about issues and stories from the home. In fact, many critics, notably male, found Disney's Wendy depiction extremely comical, saying, "the dialogue written for her in Pan is especially humorous as she never seems to stop talking" (Hanson 206). After Wendy's pride has been injured, Peter gestures to his shadow, saying, "well, get on with it, girl" (Disney 1953). Wendy, despite her cross look, picks up her needle and thread and responds, "my name's Wendy. Wendy Moira Angela Dar—" and is abruptly cut off by Peter, who says, "Wendy's enough" (Disney 1953). This Peter doesn't care about Wendy's introduction and does not even have to provide one for himself because Wendy, in complete awe of him, already knows who he is.

Where Wendy is clearly in control in Barrie's "shadow" scene, for she corrects Peter's ignorance and establishes a mothering role, Disney goes through great pains to change Barrie's original dialogue to show that Pan is always in charge of the nursery situation, and, Wendy, or "girl" as he first calls her, is just providing a service to him. This connects to Susan J. Douglas's assertion in *Where the Girls Are* that young girls in the 1950's were taught that "I would not change the world, I'd watch my boyfriend or husband do that. I did not have my own destiny; my fate, my life would be dependent on my man's" (27). Disney's Wendy exists only to aid Peter, with a domestic act no less, and does not appear to have any desires of her own—what she wants is what Peter wants. Peter frequently brushes her off throughout the film as he does in their first meeting, as if she gets in the way of his adventuring. He seems shocked by any romantic possibility between himself and Wendy, as shown in figure two when Wendy tries to show what a "kiss" is. In the figure, Peter leans away from Wendy's advances with a look of wide-eyed shock. The complex romantic-mothering parallel found in Barrie's Peter-and-Wendy relationship is greatly diminished and replaced with comedy. Wendy is repeatedly mocked and depicted as "'ooooh so straight'" while Disney's Pan is more concerned with adventuring than romance and only needed a "mother" figure to tell him stories, not to provide care in any other way (Hanson 209). Disney's new version of Pan is completely independent of the female sex, engrossed in his own adventures so that he has no time for romance, and chivalrously saves and cares for Wendy, Tiger Lily, and Tinker Bell, effectively masculinizing him and dividing the male/female binary to solve the 1940's focus groups' issues with gender confusion.

VI. "There's trouble brewin' on the island—woman trouble"

When Wendy arrives on Disney's Neverland Island, the mermaids, the Indians, and even the Lost Boys demonstrate various female gender roles and examples of socially accepted feminine behavior to her. However, her first encounter with a Neverland female occurs just before her departure in the form of the voluptuous Tinker Bell. Disney animators took Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* description of Tinker Bell quite literally—"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 *1911* 24)—when they designed the fairy Ohmer calls "explicitly sexual" (Ohmer 175). From her first appearance on screen, Tinker Bell "is exaggeratedly feminine: she checks herself in a mirror, pats her blond updo and fusses over the size of her hips" (Ohmer 175). Tinker Bell's explicit sexual feminine behavior was created as a way to amend Peter's "lack" in the film, and many critics praised her character, equating her to Betty Boop, Zsa Zsa Gabor, and Marilyn Monroe (Ohmer 175). However, animators desired to add another definitively "female" trait to the "'little vamp'"—a healthy dose of jealousy towards Wendy (Ohmer 175).

Though Tinker Bell acts against Wendy on numerous occasions in Barrie's original play and novel (she pulls Wendy's hair when she attempts to give Peter a "thimble" and she lies to the Lost Boys so that they will shoot Wendy from the sky under the assumption that Wendy is a bird), in Disney's *Peter Pan,* she is "presented as a sexy little nymph hopelessly in love with Peter," and all her acts against Wendy are a direct result of her jealousy (Hanson 206). In fact, in the

Disney film it is Tink's jealousy that motivates Hook's scheme to destroy Peter. Hook has a banished Tinker Bell captured, under the assumption that "a jealous female can be tricked to do anything" (Disney 1953). He preys on Tinker Bell's wounded nature, after she has been banished by Peter for attempting to have Wendy killed, by playing her music, comforting her, and accusing Peter of "taking the best years of her life. Casting her aside. Like an old glove" (Disney 1953). Tinker Bell, tricked by Hook's fast sympathy, reveals Pan's hideout, under Hook's assertions that he "will not lay a finger or a hook on Peter Pan," but will instead steal Wendy and take her to a distant land (Disney 1953). The fact that Tinker Bell's "feminine" jealousy brings about the capture of Wendy and the Lost Boys is a direct result of Disney's patriarchal beliefs that her behaviors are singularly feminine and their desire to present an over-feminized, over-sexed female representation to balance Peter's lack of sexuality. Susan J. Douglas, in *Where the Girls Are,* argues that by viewing *Peter Pan,* "it becomes clear that Disney studios…was obsessed with female competition and seemed to offer us only two choices: the powerless but beloved masochist [Wendy] or the powerful but detested narcissist [Tinker Bell]" (29). Douglas goes on to say that the central theme of the film is "female competition over the attentions of a boy" and that Tinker Bell, who is marked as vain from the instant she appears on screen, is probably evil and deserves to die" (Douglas 30). Disney exaggerates "certain assumptions about women and girls while clearly ignoring others" and emphasizes, through Tinker Bell and Wendy's relationship, that "girls do primarily two things—stare at themselves in the mirror and fight over boys—while the boys are more outward-looking and doing more important things"

(Douglas 30-31). These perceptions of women perpetuated by Disney can be extremely damaging, for

> These cartoon dramas put a little voice in our heads, the one always warning us to beware of other girls, especially pretty ones or ones with too much makeup, and installed the little surveillance camera in there too, the one incessantly scanning others—and ourselves—to scrutinize who *was* the fairest of them all (Douglas 31).

By perpetuating this idea of feminine competition, Disney argued its normalcy and naturalness in our culture, for there would always be "helpless, fawning" Wendys and "narcissistic" Tinker Bells—that was simply the way of the world (Douglas 31). Tinker Bell is the first malicious female that Wendy encounters in Disney's Neverland, but she is not the last.

Neverland is not the utopian island Wendy dreamed it would be; she is treated like an outsider there, which parallels her earlier expulsion from the nursery for recounting the fantastical stories about Neverland to her brothers. From her first entrance on the island, the female presences there make it very clear that she does not belong. The Lost Boys, when prompted by Tinker Bell, "shoot at her, [and] Peter seems to prefer the company of Tiger Lily and the mermaids, who, along with Tinker Bell, treat Wendy as an object of jealous hatred" (Crafton 44). The mermaids are particularly cruel to Wendy in the Disney film. Peter takes Wendy to see them, but promptly abandons her to flirt with the mermaids, leaving Wendy, who has lost her power of flight due to Peter's absence, to make the hazardous climb down to the lagoon. Wendy, in the Disney film fully relies on Peter to take her anywhere and has no power of her own, demonstrating again the patriarchal aim of the filmmakers. The mermaids fawn over the heroic Pan, as he recounts one of his many adventures to them, similar

to the star of a high school football team. When Wendy finally makes it down to the lagoon, the mermaids are furious, exclaiming, “who’s she?...what’s she doing here?” (Disney 1953). They attack Wendy, splashing her with their tails while Peter, finding fun in all of this, laughs. This “cocky, self-absorbed, egocentric, aloof, and indifferent to the feelings of females around him” Peter “likes playing the girls off one another and takes special delight in the Wendy-mermaid catfight” (Douglas 30-31). This is extremely unlike Barrie’s mermaids, who “splash everyone, male and female alike, because they don’t like people, not because they constitute some harem competing with Wendy for Peter” (Douglas 30). Peter finally stops the mermaid’s assault when Wendy threatens to retaliate, lifting a seashell to throw at her attackers. Peter asserts that the mermaids were “just havin’ a little fun” and the mermaids agree, saying, “that’s all. We were only trying to drown her” (Disney 1953). By fully dismissing these acts of violence against Wendy, Disney animators perpetuate feminine hatred and competition as a natural occurrence. Despite the fact that the audience has just witnessed a Wendy/Tinker Bell catfight, Douglas argues that “to too many men, or at least male cartoonists, the ongoing catfight between girls, especially beautiful girls, over some boy, any boy, was irresistible; they had to play it over and over’ (31). Because Wendy’s opinions are dismissed and her retaliation is discouraged, she becomes an object of humor while the mermaids are shown as superior. The mermaids superiority is also shown through their suggested “sexual awareness,” particularly in their “erotic play with Peter and teasing of Wendy about her modesty (‘she’s wearing her nightgown’)” (Crafton 44). The mermaids, who lounge voluptuously in their lagoon, “represent the attractive hedonism denied by

Wendy in her Victorian household. They are shown both as physical sex objects and as pleasurable subjects of the male gaze" (Crafton 44). Wendy always "comes up short" when compared to the mermaids, whether it is through Peter's eyes or through the male gaze of the audience that he represents.

VII. Division of Roles in the Family Structure

The clear gender division in Disney's Neverland only mirrors that in the Darling home, which reinforced the current gender norms in 1950 American society. Brett T. Mcquade, in "Peter Pan: Disney's Adaptation of J.M. Barrie's Original Work, " argues that Disney manipulates the father persona and by doing this "destroys the family structure in the work which nullifies much of the original humor caused by the inadequate male adult" (5). In the Disney film, Mrs. Darling is reduced to a minor role while in Barrie's original work the social setup of the lower-middle class Darling family is "primarily matriarchal" and that the father's immature behavior may be a result of his "strained financial position" (Mcquade 5). However, in the Disney film, the Darlings are a very well-to-do family and have no possibility of a "strained financial position." Because of this, the father is very secure in his role as head of the household and his entire role in the story is transformed.

Mr. Darling is the undisputed leader of the Darling household in Disney's *Peter Pan,* as opposed to Barrie's matriarchal Darling family. In the play, mother figures like Mrs. Darling are venerated, and "all of Mrs. Darling's ideas are sensitive and sensible, most of them concerned with the welfare of her family" (Mcquade 6). However, in the Disney version "Mrs. Darling says much less" and is equated to the children. According to Donald Crafton in "The Last Night in the

Nursery: Walt Disney's *Peter Pan*," at the opening of *Peter Pan*, "the film establishes gender differences based on the belief in imagination" (38). The film opens with a male narrator who describes the family dynamic. Our attention is immediately brought to the beautiful, Cinderella-like silhouette of Mrs. Darling. The narrator comments, "Mrs. Darling believed that Peter Pan was the spirit of youth…But Mr. Darling—well, Mr. Darling was a practical man" (Disney 1953). By placing Mr. and Mrs. Darling on opposing sides of the male/female binary and equating Mr. Darling with practicality, Disney implies that Mrs. Darling is impractical. She becomes like her children in her belief in fantasy, and, therefore, inferior to her husband. Mrs. Darling later expresses fear that Peter Pan will, in fact, come to the window as Wendy says (Mcquade 6). However, Disney's Mr. Darling, ever the "rational" man,

> gives a compulsive, jittery shiver that ruffles his whole body and yells out "Peter Pan!" Then, in a mimicry, squeaky voice he says, "sound the alarm, call Scotland yard, of all the childish fidder fatter…how can we expect the children to grow and be prudent when you are as bad as they are. No wonder Wendy gets these idiotic ideas" (Mcquade 6).

By equating his wife to his children and their imaginative ideas, Mr. Darling not only separates himself from his children but also defines the male/female boundaries as rational man, irrational female. Throughout the entire film, the female side, or the mothering side represents "nurturing tenderness" while the male or fathering side signifies "pragmatism and awareness of temporality" (Crafton 46). The mother is connected to fantasy while the father is tied to reality, and Wendy grows up only when she can accept her father's way as truth, placing the male position as the higher one in the binary relationship.

Similar to Disney's distinct gender division between Peter Pan and the story's female characters and between Mr. and Mrs. Darling, Disney also concretely divides the child and adult roles in the Darling household.
As previously stated, Mcquade in "Peter Pan: Disney's Adaptation of J.M. Barrie's Original Work" argues that by manipulating the father persona in the story, Disney "destroys the family structure in the work which nullifies much of the original humor caused by the inadequate male adult" (5). He cites the medicine scene, as quoted in Chapter One, as a prime example of Disney's Mr. Darling transformation. In the play's medicine scene, Mr. Darling, or the adult man and therefore the authority figure, "becomes the real [childish] instigator of the whole scene" (Mcquade 7). Mr. Darling calls his son a "cowardly custard" (Barrie *1904* 25) and, as the man of the house, is portrayed "as a child in grown-up clothes" (Mcquade 7). In the scene, Wendy becomes a substitute for Mrs. Darling, getting her father's medicine and acting as a peacemaker between her father and brother, illuminating "the fact that the only real adults in the house are Mrs. Darling and Wendy" (Mcquade 7). Disney, in order to cope with the "great amount of male immaturity" in Barrie's original text "nullifies almost the entire scene," effectively destroying what "Barrie intended Mr. Darling to be" (Mcquade 7). In the Disney film, he is portrayed as a normal, strict father—the "effigy of a respected, mature adult in full control" (Mcquade 7). He "never receives any looks or challenges that might show the children 'did not admire him.'" Mr. Darling even speaks rudely to Mrs. Darling and equates her with the children, dismissing her worries about Peter Pan as childish and as silly, which would never happen in a Barrie play, where the mother figure was venerated (Mcquade 7). By casting Mr. Darling as a

mature, adult father figure, Disney makes the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, which were blurred in Barrie's text, concrete. The children obey and respect the father because he is the clear leader in control and he expresses no immature similarities to his children.

VIII. The Split Between Fantasy and Reality

In the previous section, I explained that the worlds of the real and the unreal, or those of fantasy and imagination, were equated to the male and female, respectively. Mrs. Darling represents imagination and fantasy while Mr. Darling epitomizes practicality and realism. During Disney's production development, it became as important for the creators to distinguish between what was "real" in the story and what was fantasy as it was to differentiate between genders. The fantasy world was equated with the feminine and the childlike while the "real" world was connected to the masculine and the adult. Susan Ohmer writes in "Disney's *Peter Pan*: Gender, Fantasy, and Industrial Production:"

> In contrast to the Barrie texts, Disney's film creates firmer boundaries between the world of the imagination and the world of everyday life. Barrie's play includes a sequence of role reversals, in which the boys play at being their parents and present each other as babies; but in Disney's film the parents remain resolutely adult and do not cross over into childish fantasies. The children in the film play at being pirates, anticipating the scenes to come, but their antics are clearly framed as childish behavior, while the grown-ups go about their business. (168).

The original story's timeline was the most fantastical element that Disney altered in the film, for in Barrie's text, the children are gone for a long period of time, giving Mr. Darling an opportunity to see the errors of his ways (he takes to living in the Nana's dog kennel), but in the Disney film, the trip occurs in a single night. Not only does this eliminate the possibility of Mr. Darling's changing his

parenting style after being faced with the possibility of losing his children, it equates the adventures of the night more with the fantasy than with the ambiguous relationship between fantasy and reality that Barrie had established. In the film when the children return from Neverland, Big Ben chimes and is transformed as the clock in the Darling parlor, showing that only three hours have past since the children departed (Crafton 40). Wendy is sleeping on the windowsill, and it is unclear if the adventure really happened, or if she merely dreamed it, which equates the tale still more with fantasy. In fact, many critics are unsure as to whether Disney meant for the events of the film to occur in Wendy's dream or if they truly happened: Bruce Hanson in *Peter Pan on Stage and Screen—1904-2010* states without a doubt that "a new ending unnecessarily reveals that Wendy had been dreaming about the adventures in Never Never Land" (202), while Donald Crafton in "The Last Night in the Nursery: Walt Disney's *Peter Pan*" asserts that Disney did not employ the "'old device of a dream'" but treated the adventure as "'a flight of the imagination, rather than an actual absence of weeks or months'" (36). Despite Disney's intention that the adventure itself was "real," the sheer fact that critics are in disagreement as to whether it was a dream or not attests to the distinction between the real and unreal world—the nursery, the Darling home, and London are all real, while Neverland, whether it exists in dream form or as a three-hour-long "flight of the imagination'" is unreal, creating a firmer division than Barrie's *Peter Pan*, when the adventure is more real than imaginary because the parents acknowledge the children's long absence.

In "The Last Night in the Nursery: Walt Disney's *Peter Pan*," Donald

Crafton argues that because Disney creates Wendy as the protagonist of the story, *Peter Pan* becomes a tale about growing up, or, more specifically about the girl who did grow up as opposed to the boy who wouldn't grow up. Changing the narrative in such a way creates a new message: growing up, and—more specifically for Wendy—motherhood, is a "natural and inevitable" part of the "real" world (Crafton 49). In order to promote ideas of motherhood, of children advancing to adulthood, and of the nuclear family, Disney presented "anti-families" in the Neverland Indians, mermaids, pirates, and Lost Boys (Crafton 49). Crafton cites Wendy's relationship to the Lost Boys to be especially important because she is brought to Neverland specifically to be their mother:

> Marked by their animal-skin suits and their incongruous "Bowery Boys" accents, they clearly need a mother's nurturing guidance. For the adult audience, the Lost Boys represent the decivilizing effects of lack of parental control…the film suggests to the parents of children about Wendy's age that the more desirable alternative is to inculcate the values that bring families together, values opposite those "bad" qualities demonstrated by Hook, Smee, and Peter in his temporary role as authoritarian Victorian father (49).

These "anti-families" prompt Wendy to return home to the "real" world, departing her world of fantasy and, inevitably, to grow up.

In addition to emphasizing the natural inevitability and reality of growing up, Disney illustrates that by making the choice to advance to adulthood, Wendy has accepted her father's practicality over her mother's belief in fantasy. In order to understand Disney's Mr. Darling's connection with the natural process of growing up, one need only look to the differences between Barrie's text and Disney's film when Mr. Darling expels Nana from the nursery. In the novel, Mr. Darling is purely concerned with how his wife and children perceive him. By this

point in the play, “George Darling has lost the respect of his wife, the children, and the family dog as well as the audience” and is now a desperate man (Mcquade 7). He takes Nana out of the nursery, exclaiming “I refuse to allow that dog to lord it in my nursery for one hour longer…am I master in this house or is she?” (Barrie *1904* 27). The scene becomes a territory war between him and the family dog, which he fears will become “lord” over him. However, the Disney Mr. Darling is a more mature and realistic father. Though Nana is driven out of the house for upsetting Mr. Darling in this version as well, he reveals his true motive for separating the dog from his children, saying to Nana, “you’re not a nurse, you’re a dog and the children are not puppies. They are people, and sooner or later Nana—people have to grow up” (Disney 1953). Brett T. Mcquade in “Peter Pan: Disney’s Adaptation of J.M. Barrie’s Original Work” explains the implications of this Mr. Darling transformation:

> Nana may have upset him, but his reasons for taking her from the nursery has nothing at all to do with jealousy or fear that he is compromising his position as household king. He seems to have a genuine interest in his children’s future and maturation; he doesn’t want their heads filled with fiddle fatter. Having a dog as a nurse may be extending the children’s imaginations too far, and this Mr. Darling seems to doubt the ability of a dog to care for his children, as any realistic father would undoubtedly do (8).

Mr. Darling becomes a realistic man purely concerned with his children’s well being. His transformation and reasonable statement about Nana destroys the audience’s suspension of disbelief that would allow a dog to be a nurse by declaring that such a thing cannot occur in the “real” world. This Mr. Darling denies Barrie’s original world and presents an argument for reality that Wendy later accepts.

At the end of the film, after Mr. and Mrs. Darling have awoken Wendy from her rest by the window, the family experiences a crucial moment that argues for the "restructuring of the family into a patriarchal unit" (Mcquade 9). Wendy recounts their adventures as Mr. Darling wearily says, "Oh, Mary, I'm going to bed" and turns to walk out of the nursery (Disney 1953). However, Wendy and Mrs. Darling draw his attention to Peter's sailing ship cloud outside the window, and Mr. Darling looks out, saying "you know, I have the strangest feeling that I've seen that ship before, when I was very young" (Disney 1953). Wendy responds, "Oh, Father," and hugs him, creating the ending tableau of Mr. Darling, flanked on either side by Mrs. Darling and Wendy, who has agreed to grow up (Disney 1953). Because Mr. Darling states that he had seen the ship before when he was very young, the film implies that fantasy is an acceptable quality of childhood that one outgrows when one matures. Though Wendy has experienced the adventure with Peter Pan, she must now grow up and assume the patriarchal role already decided for her, as mother of her own family. This final scene shows that "Wendy's love and respect for her father [has] grown" and that she has accepted Mr. Darling's adult practicality over childish fantasy (Mcquade 8). By presenting a final tableau of the family united and embracing one another, Disney "presents a platform for recuperating the traditional family by intergenerational compromise and tolerance" (Crafton 50). The final tableau demonstrates a prime argument that Disney, "as the studio most associated with manufacturing 'family entertainment'…was a master at fostering and responding to [the] legitimating ideology of domestic amelioration" (Crafton 49). Children, specifically female children, would view *Peter Pan* and discover acceptable modes of behavior,

perpetuating ideologies of the nuclear family, proper gender roles, and the differentiation between fantasy and reality.

Disney's *Peter Pan* was created in an attempt to cling to cultural values of the late 1940's-early 1950's during a time when American culture was very much in flux. By establishing clear distinctions between fluid binaries Barrie established in his original text, most notably between male/female, childhood/adulthood, and reality/fantasy, Disney attempted to construct a new meaning for the company, during a period "when gender roles, the nature of fantasy, and the meaning of childhood also fluctuated" (Ohmer 153). In this way, Disney's *Peter Pan* can be viewed as an attempt to make sense of a world that was rapidly changing. *Peter Pan* was the tool used to make this cultural change, and has remained a Disney staple since its creation, as shown by its many re-releasings of the film, creation of a sequel, *Return to Neverland*, and making of the spin-off *Tinkerbell* movies that appeal to young girls today. Tinkerbell herself remains a Disney mascot, opening many a Disney animation film while flying in front of Cinderella's castle, providing the argument that *Peter Pan* may be one of the most well-known Disney films. The Disney version of the story is certainly one of the most recognized, and may be some viewers' quintessential Peter Pan.

Chapter Three
Contemporary Peter Pan

I. The Cultural Inheritance of Peter Pan

When one hears the words, "Peter Pan," images that undoubtedly come to mind are a woman in green tights, metal flying wires, the iconic green hat with a red feather as made popular by Disney, and the voluptuous cartoon vixen Tinker Bell. These associations are so consistent because the latter end of the twentieth century inherited two immensely popular versions of Barrie's original tale: Disney's 1953 film, *Peter Pan,* and Mary Martin's Broadway *Peter Pan* production of the same year, which later became an NBC television broadcast in 1960. Both versions gained colossal popularity at the time because of the star-quality associated with the respective productions; by 1953, Disney was a household name in animation and family entertainment, and the 1960 musical starring Mary Martin was produced as a vehicle for its star performer, with the intention, from its creation, to exist as a medium to attract audiences that would pay to see Martin as a singing Peter Pan (Hanson 223). These popular versions, however, were a far cry from Barrie's original text, which itself flitted from the spotlight of popular culture to the realm of classic children's fiction, untouched by many a reader and unperformed on stages across the United Kingdom and America. Barrie's story of Peter Pan remained, but was morphed and transformed through the decades after leaving the author's hands. The Pan the theatrical and literary world had known had changed, and was now easily accessible on VHS, and later, DVD in homes across America many years later.

In this final chapter, I intend to argue that contemporary American culture has inherited two versions of *Peter Pan*, the traditional, as represented by Barrie's original text, and the popular, denoted in this argument by Disney. These two versions exist in binary opposition to each other, for in the former version one finds Barrie's open ambiguity in the realms of gender roles, sexuality, and fantasy vs. reality, while the latter illustrates Disney's reaffirmation of traditional social binaries. I intend to argue that in the latter half of the twentieth to the early twenty-first century, Disney's *Peter Pan,* not Barrie's text, becomes the standard version of the story that contemporary retellings attempt to either rework or work against. To explore this relationship, I will first conduct a close reading of one of the more popular literary retellings of *Peter Pan*, Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's *Peter and the Starcatchers*, and then examine the Broadway play based upon that novel, entitled *Peter and the Starcatcher* (no "s"). I will later move to an analysis of a modern-day (late twentieth—early twenty-first century) tradition of creating a "dark" Peter Pan narrative, which actively works against Disney's story, positioning the Disney version, then, as the primary text. I will end with an examination of modern-day film versions of the story in order to argue that we, as a culture, are far from comfortable with the ambiguity that Barrie sets up in his original *Peter Pan* text and that we pursue avenues, in a process fairly similar to Disney, to settle those ambiguities and to define the binaries that exist in Barrie's mutable, inconsistent, and indefinable Peter Pan.

II. *Peter and the Starcatchers*—Re-Appropriating Disney

Published in 2004, humor columnist Dave Barry and best-selling novelist Ridley Pearson co-authored a children's novel that presented a prequel to Peter

Pan's adventures in Neverland entitled *Peter and the Starcatchers*. The children's book gained fast fame in a short amount of time, provoking the authors to expand the one novel to a five-book series and prompting a stage version based upon the original novel, entitled *Peter and the Starcatcher* (no "s"), which premiered on Broadway to great acclaim in 2012 (Han). *Peter and the Starcatchers* poses a possible origin story to explain how a boy named Peter became "the boy who wouldn't grow up." The novel begins with young orphaned Peter who, along with his mates from St. Norbert's Home for Wayward Boys, are sent aboard a ship called "the Never Land" to become servants for an evil king in the fictional land of Rundoon. Mistakenly on board the rickety, old Never Land ship is a trunk full of a mysterious golden substance called starstuff. Peter, with the help of his mysterious and pretty friend, Molly Aster, must protect the trunk by all costs from pirates, led by the evil Black Stache (the origin of Captain Hook), and Indians when the ship wrecks on Mollusk Island. The starstuff has very powerful and magical qualities, and can transform any person, creature, or object that it comes into contact with—providing a convenient explanation for mermaids, flying children, fairies, and boys who can remain young forever. Through the starstuff interference, Black Stache becomes Captain Hook, Mollusk Island becomes Neverland, and the orphaned Peter becomes not quite the Peter Pan readers know in Barrie's novel, but he certainly becomes the boy who wouldn't grow up. The plot of the novel is incited by the starstuff and who has possession of the starstuff, for whoever obtains the magical substance has absolute power. The starstuff, then, which is the driving force of the novel, is

linked to imperial power and to British imperialism, placing the Peter Pan narrative itself in history.

By creating a narrative with a base in imperialism and empire, Barry and Pearson displace the Peter Pan narrative from the place of ambiguity and myth that Barrie originally established to a foundation in history, thereby transplanting the story from the fantasy world to reality. All elements of "magic" are disqualified, for the starstuff of the novel is an element more related to science and the history of empire than to myth and fantasy. In the novel, Barry and Pearson provide a chapter of exposition in which Molly explains the starstuff, its powers, and its place in modern history to Peter. The starstuff, Molly says, is an immensely powerful element that falls from the sky and has the ability to give people, animals, and objects extraordinary abilities like flight, strength, and extreme intelligence, to name a few. Because the starstuff is so incredibly powerful, naturally it has created arguments and discrepancies on earth as to who can possess such a power. Eventually, those vying for the starstuff split into two factions: the Starcatchers, of which Molly and her father Leonard Aster are members, whose job it is to find the starstuff and return it to the sky before a human or creature with less admirable intentions gets hold of it, and the Others, who want the starstuff only for the power they can possess. To gain Peter's trust and belief in her fantastic explanation, Molly places the starstuff narrative in history, explaining the origin of Greek and Roman deities as beings who had acquired starstuff, and then extending that to royalty and past wars:

> Except that they weren't gods. They were people who'd found the starstuff. But to ordinary people, they appeared to be gods; they inspired fear; they were worshipped, they were obeyed absolutely. In time they learned to

> guard their secret better, to use the power more subtly; instead of gods, they were called royalty. But they ruled just the same. They grew in power; they prospered; they had families; there came to be more of them. They all wanted the power; they all needed the starstuff…and so there came to be struggles, desperate struggles, over the starstuff that was known to exist, and the new batches that fell to the earth. *Wars* were fought, Peter. In the history you were taught, the wars were caused by disputes over land, or trade, or religion. And some of them were. But in truth, much of the death and misery visited upon mankind over the centuries was the result of a secret, vicious struggle, among a very few people, over starstuff
>
> (Barry, Pearson 160).

By connecting the starstuff and the acquisition of it to real-world battles over power, land, and wealth, the starstuff itself becomes an object centered in imperialism, and, more specifically, the imperialism of the British Empire. The starstuff becomes entwined in England's historical quest for empire, placing Great Britain and the Queen, or the conquering imperialists, on the side of the good Starcatchers and any of the empire's enemies on the side of the evil Others. Placing the starstuff in the actual narrative of British history seems quite believable to both Peter and the reader, and her explanation gains Peter's trust and his aid to the Starcatcher's mission. However, if the reader still had any qualms about the starstuff's relationship to imperialism, a war over the magical substance and the land itself is fought on Mollusk Island during the remainder of the novel, ending in a climactic battle between good and evil.

The last chapters of the novel find a three-way battle for power: the pirates want the starstuff to use for their own gain, Peter, Molly, and friends want the starstuff to protect the world from the damage it could cause if it fell to the pirates, and the Indians (the native "savages" of Mollusk Island) want to understand what the starstuff is, and, more importantly, to get all of these intruders away from their land. We find all three leaders –Peter, pirate captain

Black Stache, and chief of the Mollusk people, Fighting Prawn—in a battle over the trunk of starstuff. In a last-ditch effort to obtain the starstuff, Black Stache attempts to kill the wily Peter with a stab to the heart, but Peter flies up just in time to miss the sword blade, which finds its mark in Fighting Prawn's chest. Peter, recognizing that if the chief dies, all his friends will also at the hands of the Mollusk people, saves Fighting Prawn's life by using the starstuff as a healing agent, creating an alliance between the two parties. Banding together, the junior Starcatchers and the Island Natives are able to defeat the pirates and protect the starstuff, Peter cutting off Black Stache's, soon to become Captain Hook's, arm and feeding it to the crocodile in the process. The pirates retreat and the two remaining parties emerge victorious, in possession of both the starstuff and the island. By saving Fighting Prawn's life, Peter, in the role of leader for his party, created a strategic alliance that would protect his side and later give them shelter, for Fighting Prawn later says "the boy saved my life…he is welcome here, and so are his friends. They have the protection of the Mollusk people for as long as they choose to remain" (Barry, Pearson 444-445). Due to his imperialistic strategy, Peter is able both to acquire the powerful substance and build the foundation of an empire, for Mollusk Island later becomes his Neverland Island, and emerges as the winning side, while Black Stache leaves the battle powerless and with a stump of a hand. Though Barry and Pearson are of course arguing for the power of good to triumph over evil, they are also playing by the rules of imperialistic nations in acquisition of empire that reflects historical battles of conquering nations, especially that of Great Britain. For though Peter has secured an alliance with the Mollusk people and they seem to be on equal terms, he still theoretically

takes the land from the "savage" people by changing the name to Neverland, discrediting their possession of it and claiming it as his own. This narrative is a very familiar one to any who have studied the history of conquering nations and conquered "savages," which therefore displaces Barrie's original myth-like Peter Pan to a historically "real" world.

By being in itself a novel that explains the origin of the fabled Peter Pan in a historicized manner, *Peter and the Starcatchers* debunks J.M. Barrie's original intent in writing *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* in 1904 and *Peter and Wendy* in 1911. When Barrie first created Peter Pan, it was with the objective that Peter himself would rise to myth status in popular culture, on the same level as fairy tales such as *Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel,* or *Sleeping Beauty*. Barrie himself presents a clear argument for the intended myth status of Peter Pan in his written dedication for the five Llewelyn Davies boys, *To the Five: A Dedication*. In the dedication, he credits the boys with creating Peter Pan and asserts that he has "no recollection of writing the play of *Peter Pan*" (Barrie 7). In the novel *Peter and Wendy,* the narrator also says that Peter Pan has always been and would always be, and that the reader's mother and grandmother would know who Peter Pan was, just as sure as the reader did (Barrie 12). These statements create a Peter Pan who exists of his own accord as a mythological creature, separate from the author and outside historical time. By making Peter Pan a myth, Barrie erases his own position as creator and changes the way authorship is understood. According to Fabio L. Vericat in "The Novelization of *Peter Pan* as Literary Hybrid," "Barrie seems willingly to partake in the childhood innocence of his creation, and, thus, erases a linear casual trace leading back to his

authorial…agency in his (pro)creation. The literary implication is that if Peter Pan is art itself, the boy is his own creator" (108). Vericat goes on to cite R.D.S. Jack, who in "The Manuscript of Peter Pan" states that "'the desire to conceal the power of his own art in order to glorify both the creative strength of motherhood and the free imagination of youth is, for Barrie, not a whim but an important part of the myth…this helps perpetuate the idea that the play simply has no written origin'" in either time or specific context (Vericat 108). Both quotations, alongside Barrie's refusal of authorship in *A Dedication*, illustrate Barrie's intent to create folklore or myth in his creation of Peter Pan. *Peter and the Starcatchers,* therefore, by being in itself an origin story that provides an explanation for Peter Pan, Neverland, fairy dust, and all other magical elements of the story, contradicts the mythological intent and places the 2004 novel in history. Every aspect of Peter's origin is clearly explained away by starstuff interference—starstuff being an object that, as it falls from the sky, can be more identified with science of this world than ambiguous "magic" that exists in other worlds, like the Neverland of Barrie's original creation. In this way, *Peter and the Starcatchers'* classification as an origin story moves the novel further from Barrie's original work and closer to a foundation in science and history.

Despite this, *Peter and the Starcatchers*' connection to the Disney classic is rendered indisputable when one glimpses the name of the publisher: Hyperion Books, a subsidiary of Disney, with the telltale Disney logo even included on the title page. However, the novel presents a very different view of Englishness than the tourist-like view that one experiences through Disney. In the Disney film, one gains a very popularized version of London and Englishness; when Peter, Wendy,

John, Michael, and Tinker Bell fly from the nursery window to Neverland, the viewer is bombarded with views of London Bridge, St. Paul's Cathedral, and, of course, the iconic picture of Big Ben. Barry and Pearson do something very different with the story by placing it in history and using the starstuff as an avenue to explore and explain British imperialism. By introducing imperialism and setting their story during the time Barrie was writing *Peter Pan*, Barry and Pearson effectively connect *Peter and the Starcatchers* back to Barrie and the original Peter Pan narrative. Barrie's original play was rife with themes of imperialism, and many critics argue that through the relationship between the Lost Boys, the Pirates, and the Indians, "Peter Pan offers a prime example of how dramatic representations of race helped to create and communicate a shared vision of what it meant to be a white British national as opposed to this subject's 'other'" (Brewer 387-388). Essayist Mary Brewer goes on to say in "*Peter Pan* and the White Imperial Imagery" that "the play's political unconscious is rooted in real stories of violent conquest, the British Empire, and Victorian notions of racial difference" (388). Barry and Pearson acknowledge these connections that the original play and novel have to the world Barrie was writing in and use them, as explained above in the *Peter and the Starcatchers* passage in which Molly describes the history of starstuff, to connect the "magic" of the Peter Pan story to the history of Great Britain itself. Barry and Pearson, therefore, use imperialism as an avenue to bring Barrie back into the context of the story and distance themselves from Disney's tourist London experience.

However, the popular novel's association with Disney cannot be completely disqualified by Barry and Pearson's clever placement of the Peter Pan

narrative into history. Michael Gorra, in his *New York Times* review of the novel at the time of its publication entitled, "'Peter and the Starcatchers': Next Stop, Neverland," explains that in the novel

> The pages fly -- and yet on my initial silent reading the book didn't cast anything like a narrative spell. It's full of magic, but never once did it make me feel as though I were entering another world. J. M. Barrie does that, and so in his very different way does Lemony Snicket. I can easily believe that this book's authors had a really good time, but the result feels more manufactured than imagined…Peter and the Starcatchers" is as rigorously blocked as a shooting script, moving suspensefully from one group of characters to another, with the action shifting around every few pages…Pearson and Barry offer a deft combination of laughter and fear—that is, fear undergirded by a sense of final safety. It's a roller coaster of a plot in more senses than one, and considering their publisher—Disney, with its Tinkerbell logo well displayed here—I don't suppose that's a surprise (Gorra 1).

In other words, *Peter and the Starcatchers,* with its fast-paced action well suited to a "shooting script" is in many ways more of a re-appropriation of Disney's *Peter Pan* than of Barrie's. However, the similarities between *Peter and the Starcatchers* and Disney's *Peter Pan* do not stop there; on the contrary, the novel is riddled with connections to the Disney classic, including, but not limited to, the friendly, talking porpoises that are not a far cry from Cinderella or Snow White's benevolent animal friends.

III. *Starcatchers* Perpetuates Defined Gender Roles

Barry and Pearson, similar to Disney, present characters with clearly defined gender roles. Though the gender politics of the novel are certainly not those of the 1950's, they are no more progressive for 2011 that those in the Disney film were for 1953. The Peter found in *Peter and the Starcatchers*, though undoubtedly less cocky and selfish than Disney's Pan, is clearly "all boy," while the supporting character, Molly, a young girl similar in age to Peter and the

substitute for a Wendy figure, is "all girl." Molly is in many ways arguably unlike Barrie's Wendy, who represented a generation of young girls nearly one hundred years prior to *Peter and the Starcatchers*' creation. This supporting female is a twenty-first century girl, for she is clever, assertive, tenacious, a leader, and a bit of a rule-breaker—all-in-all modern-day hero material, and a poster girl for the contemporary, independent young woman. In these ways, she is a step away from Disney's Wendy or Tinker Bell, but though Molly possesses these strong characteristics, she, like Wendy, must take a back seat in the main action, for this is Peter's origin story and she is only a piece in the puzzle. In fact, many times she exists as only an object of Peter's male gaze, and therefore as an avenue to clarify and define Peter's, and, by extension, her own, gender and sexuality.

Peter is attracted to Molly the moment he first lays eyes on her, and Barry and Pearson go through great pains to make this known to the reader. Molly appears quite early in the narrative, in a chapter title that bears only her name, which signifies that she is both important and mysterious, for we have no met her yet. Orphan Peter, while aboard a ship conveniently named the *Never Land*,

> was distracted by a giggle, and turned to see a rare sight: a girl…the girl he saw now in no way resembled the headmaster's daughter. She had large, wide-set green eyes, and long brown hair that curled slightly and turned to gold at the tips. She wore a long, straight blue dress that accentuated the slimness of her frame. She was perhaps an inch taller than Peter, and by the look of her she took baths…he straightened his posture and tried to look older. (Barry, Pearson 19-20).

Though Peter's action of standing up straighter in Molly's presence can be interpreted as a choice to make him appear older and therefore superior, the author also notes that Peter believed the girl to be pretty, for she was very unlike the unattractive headmaster's daughter and had attractive hair, eyes, and a "slim

frame." Therefore, his choice to stand up straighter to appear older could be a choice to make himself appear more attractive to the girl. In this way, Peter, as a young boy between the age of nine and thirteen (the novel does not specify his age, explaining that Peter himself does not know), enacts a culturally-accepted norm of his gender by expressing attraction to a young girl of similar age, and by doing so reassures the reader that he is, in fact, both completely human and completely male, destroying any doubts of his classification. The readers, then, can identify with Peter and by doing so feel safe in their recognition of his culturally acceptable behavior. This Peter, like Disney's, reassures social binaries by defining Barrie's formerly unclassifiable Pan.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Disney story editors, when viewing Barrie's original text, underwent similar issues of undefined gender and sexuality when creating their new version of Peter Pan. Disney story analyst Dorothy Blank, originally disturbed by Pan's "'sexual ambiguity,'" implored writers to "'remove forever any doubts about sex, and make our hero all boy— fun, fierce, brave and a little tough'" (Olmer 174). To do this, they created a Peter Pan who was not romantically interested in Wendy or any of the other Neverland females, but whose only focus was the origin of his next adventure. Barry and Pearson, in *Peter and the Starcatchers*, take another avenue to define Peter's gender and sexuality by making it explicitly known that he is just an average pre-teenage to young teenage boy enacting acceptable social behaviors for his gender. Disney originally explored a similar tactic to define Peter's gender and sexuality as "all boy" by presenting an understandable relationship to a female character when *Peter Pan* was in the focus group stage in the late 1940's. The possibility was

abandoned during that era because many viewers lamented that by creating an explicitly romantic relationship between Peter and Wendy, Disney would destroy the "youthful innocence" of Barrie's story (Crafton 163). However, during the early twenty-first century, Disney's *Peter Pan* had displaced Barrie's original text as the standard version of the story, therefore the issue Barry and Pearson faced was not whether they would mar the initial story—for both authors, in an interview, claim that their story is to be taken as a possible origin explanation, as a "'what if…how did a boy become the incredible Peter Pan,'" and not as a rewriting of Barrie's text—but the question was how they could perpetuate a version that had been previously successful and that would, more importantly, be publishable, and by a Disney-affiliated company nonetheless (dailyfig.figment.com). One of the many Disney-approved techniques that Barry and Pearson implemented for creating a successful Peter Pan adaptation was constructing gender structures for both Peter and the novel's main characters that, though shifted for a different moment in time, more reproduces than resists Disney's 1953 creation.

Peter's infatuation with Molly becomes a motif of the novel, presenting the argument that Barry and Pearson must actively assert Peter's normalcy and clear definition as a heterosexual boy who is fully human in order to work against the ambiguous Peter in Barrie's creation, who is defined as a "betwixt-and-between," or a being not entirely of this world (Barrie *The Little White Bird* 60). However, because Barry and Pearson assert that they have created a "variation" of Peter Pan and not an "adaptation" of J.M. Barrie's original text, it can be inferred that it is not Barrie they are working against, but Disney they are striving to rework and

reproduce for a modern audience (dailyfig.figment.com). Instances of Peter's attraction for Molly are peppered throughout the children's novel, as if they exist as reminders of *this* Peter's completely natural, socially acceptable, and defined gender role. This Peter, however, unlike Disney's, becomes distracted from his adventurous exploits, presenting a need in the early twenty-first century to clearly assert Peter's sexuality that was perhaps not as present in the 1940's-1950's. When Disney created their Peter, the omission of a clear romantic attachment was meant to induce the audience to infer that Peter merely had more important activities to attend to than affiliating with girls. It was assumed by audiences, during that time, that Peter was then heterosexual by default. However, there is certainly something to be said that in a twenty-first century children's novel readers require clear and repetitive proof that their hero is indeed "all boy" because he feels a distracting attraction to a girl. This need to assert heterosexuality, in fact, trumps *Peter and the Starcatchers*' task to establish Peter's boyishness by being a competent adventurer—the definition of his sexuality is much more pertinent in the narrative. For example, in chapter forty-one of *Peter and the Starcatchers,* Peter and Molly are in hiding from the pirates and the "savages" who will later become the Indians of Neverland Island. As Peter crouches in the vine thicket with Molly, carefully concentrating on the task at hand, his thoughts move in another direction: "Peter moved close, looking over her shoulder, careful not to touch her, but very aware of the fact that he liked the way her neck smelled" (Barry Pearson 264). Peter's attention fluctuates freely between the current adventure and his attraction for Molly, asserting that he can be both the "all boy" adventurer of Disney's *Peter Pan* and the all male

protagonist that a twenty-first century audience requires. In this way, Barry and Pearson perpetuate Disney's rigid gender structure for a modern audience while also clarifying even more explicitly Peter's formerly unclassifiable sexuality, which, left undefined, provokes more discomfort from a twenty-first century audience, who are more aware than a 1950's audience that definitions of sexuality can no longer be assumed by performative gender roles. The need to define Peter's sexuality illuminates a wide spread cultural anxiety regarding sexual ambiguity, for readers of *Peter and the Starcatchers* are provided with these constant reassurances because Barry and Pearson assume they are needed to create an enjoyable narrative. If there were no discomfort regarding the sexuality of the main character, it would not need to be so clearly defined.

In addition to perpetuating Disney-established defined gender roles, *Peter and the Starcatchers* also continues the Disney *Peter Pan* tradition of feminine jealousy, hatred, and competition, as well as sexualizing Neverland females, especially the mermaids. In *Peter and the Starcatchers,* mermaids are created when colorful island fish come in contact with the starstuff trunk, which, being poorly made, leaks the magical, golden substance into the surrounding waters. The starstuff enhances the fishes' intelligence and transforms them into beautiful, half-woman half-fish creatures. It is notable to mention that though logically it would be assumed that some of the fish that gathered around the box would have been male, in the novel, the result of the fishes' contact with the starstuff produces only mer*maids*, no mermen. The beautiful she-fish function as objects that distract the pirates and other island men later in the novel, and they also attract Peter. Through Peter's eyes, the mermaid leader, Teacher, becomes

an object of the male gaze, similar to the highly sexualized Disney mermaids, when he finds her injured on the beach:

> He saw her immediately: a girl lying facedown in t he shallow water, her long blond hair splayed forward, touching the sand…Peter ran to the girl, dropping to his knees into the water. He took her by the shoulders and turned her over, and immediately noticed several things. The first was that she was startlingly beautiful, with astonishingly large, luminescent green eyes. The second was that she did not appear to be wearing any clothes, her only covering came from her lush cascade of hair. Ordinarily this second thing would have gotten Peter's full attention, but he was distracted by the third thing, which was blood seeping from a deep gash in her forehead (Barry, Pearson 360).

By describing first her appearance and then her nudity before even touching on her state of being, Barry and Pearson argue that her physical beauty and sexualized nudity are more important for the reader to know than the fact that she is mortally wounded. They even joke about her nudity before mentioning the blood on her forehead, once again reassuring the reader of Peter's socially acceptable attraction towards a beautiful, nude woman while also turning the mermaid into an object that can be freely regarded. Peter, soon after the above passage, saves the mermaid's life with the healing powers of starstuff, and she later returns the favor when he is critically injured. The mermaid leader, Teacher, rescues Peter, who is drowning in the lagoon waters, and gives him mouth-to-mouth to resuscitate him. However, Barry and Pearson convert this life-saving experience to a sexual one between Peter and Teacher:

> Peter had never kissed a girl…he must be dreaming, because he was in the arms of a girl, a very beautiful girl, with blond hair and green eyes…and this beautiful girl was holding him, and her mouth was touching his mouth, and—the strangest thing—*her breath was becoming Peter's breath*. The strangest thing. A dream, certainly. But it was a pleasant dream, and Peter decided the best thing to do was simply let go and enjoy it (Barry, Pearson 368-369).

By reducing Teacher's heroic act to a sexualized "dream," her action is disqualified, and she is reduced to an almost pornographic object that Peter must "enjoy." Teacher and the other mermaids continue to aid Peter throughout the novel's quest, but their contributions are continually disqualified, because immediately after mermaids are mentioned, a description either of their incredible beauty or an exclamation of surprise that such lovely-looking creatures could perform acts of strength or brutality follows.

However, it must be again noted that *Peter and the Starcatchers,* though Disney-sponsored, was published more than half a century later, and though it bears many similarities to the Disney classic, there are many crucial differences, such as the placement of the Peter Pan story into history itself and the construction of female characters like Molly and Teacher. Teacher is very interesting to examine due to the choice of her name. She is the leader of the newly created mermaids on Mollusk Island, for she was the first of the fish to encounter the starstuff trunk and begin the transformation from fish to "magical" creature. She teaches her fellow mermaids how to embrace their new form and aids Peter on numerous occasions, arguably teaching him as well. Through the character of Teacher, Barry and Pearson create an influential female leader that was not present in the Disney or any other previous popularized version of the Peter Pan narrative. Teacher is a strong ruling force for the mermaids, but her name also implies intelligence and a nurturing nature to impart her wisdom to others. This characterization choice significantly distances *Peter and the Starcatchers* from the mermaids in Disney's *Peter Pan,* but, as mentioned above, the novel is rife with sexualized and hedonistic descriptions of the mermaids that

are similar to Disney's portrayal. It seems that with Teacher's name and characterization, Barry and Pearson made an attempt to modernize the story for a twenty-first century audience, but attachment to the commercially successful Disney film still remains.

In addition to similarities to their description of the mermaids, Barry and Pearson illustrate, just as Disney does in their *Peter Pan*, that if one puts two attractive women in the vicinity of one another, there is bound to be competition and hatred. Peter, unaware of this "fact" about women as he is, seeks to unite Molly and Teacher, with the hope that the two young women who have helped him so much will become friendly. However, that, of course, is impossible in this world:

> "Molly," said Peter, "this is Teacher." She was, as Peter had said, beautiful, her long blond tresses flowing elegantly down her front. Molly felt hideously dowdy in contrast; her dress was wet, her hair a tangled mess. "I'm sure you two will be great friends," said Peter. Molly and Teacher eyed each other in the manner of two young women who will never, ever, be great friends (Barry, Pearson 414).

Of course Molly must feel inadequate when comparing herself to the beautiful Teacher, enough so that she despises her as soon as she sees her, for that is the assumed behavior of women. Because both Molly and Teacher are beautiful, talented, and closely associated with Peter, there *must* be competition between them—it is only natural. This interaction between human girl and mermaid sets up the Disney scene (explained in chapter two), which occurs later in the scheme of the Peter Pan storyline but was, of course, created much earlier, in which the mermaids loathe Wendy on sight for her association with Peter and attempt to drown her. Barry and Pearson perpetuate the idea, like Disney, that feminine

jealousy and even feminine cruelty in competition is not only a common occurrence but also an expected one. Molly and Teacher will never be friends not because it is an impossible event, but because the two male authors deem it impossible.

IV. The Implications of *Peter and the Starcatchers*

Because Hyperion Books, a subsidiary of Disney, published *Peter and the Starcatchers* it becomes easy to find connections between the two reproductions of Barrie's original tale, though *Peter and the Starcatchers* succeeds Disney's *Peter Pan* by almost sixty years. Upon close inspection, one can find similarities between how both works establish gender and how they attempt to reassert sexuality, even if they take different avenues in order to do so. The gender politics of 2011 are certainly not those of 1953, but both works are reductive in their classifications of gender and certainly fear the ambiguity that Barrie establishes in his original work. However, *Peter and the Starcatchers* lays the groundwork for a slightly more progressive version of the tale that would bring Peter again from the page to the stage.

Peter and the Starcatchers immediately gained great commercial success in children's literature, so it only made sense to keep the profit chain going. Barry and Pearson, who originally intended for the book to inspire a three-novel series, eventually increased their three-book quota to a series of five novels. Disney's Hyperion Books commissioned playwright Rick Elice to transform the successful novel into a play, which began at the La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego, California and eventually landed on Broadway, spurring a successful run and an eventual tour (K. Jones 1). Barry and Pearson's *Peter and the Starcatchers* became *Peter*

and the Starcatcher (no "s"), which gained immense popularity and national acclaim even faster than the novel. It is interesting to note that Barrie's original *Peter Pan* was a narrative that moved from the stage to the novel, although it began on the stage first. Perhaps, there was a modern day intention to mimic the success of Barrie's original creation, which, coincidentally, premiered on the London stage in 1904, almost exactly a hundred years before *Peter and the Starcatchers*' publication in 2004, while *Peter and Wendy,* Barrie's novelization of the Peter Pan story, was published in 1911, a hundred years before *Peter and the Starcatcher*'s premiere in New York City. The hundred-year difference is certainly an interesting coincidence that only further argues for publishers and producers intended recreation of the original Peter Pan success.

V. Spectacle and Stagecraft in *Peter and the Starcatcher*

In early Spring 2011, Rick Elice's play, *Peter and the Starcatcher,* adapted from Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's children's novel, *Peter and the Starcatchers*, moved from California to the New York Theatre Workshop, with Broadway intentions on the horizon. Its east coast debut pleased many a critic, who cited the play's fun and whimsical theatricality as the force that would propel it straight to Broadway. David Sheward, in his *Back Stage* production review when it was performed at the New York Theatre Workshop, exclaims,

> if fun is what this kid wants, he should be sitting in the audience. A satiric riff on the Peter Pan story, this combination of Victorian-music-hall spoof and children's theater spectacle has enough fun to fill the dreams of any boy, girl, adult, or theater critic with a sense of joy and an open spirit (40).

In this critique and many others, the subject that gained the most attention was not the narrative of the play, but the stagecraft that was employed to tell the

story. In fact, for many critics and theatregoers alike, it was not the narrative of the play that one remembered when exiting the theater—it was the sense of fun, spectacle, and hilarious antics created by the production values and stagecraft, which may have prompted this critic's classification of the play as a "satiric riff on the Peter Pan story". Of course, much of Barry and Pearson's original text was altered in order to transform the novel to the stage, but I believe that the power of the original story was lost and replaced with, albeit brilliant, stagecraft and comedic characterizations. In fact, the most that Sheward mentions of the play's text itself in his critique is to remark on the comedic nuances:

> Rick Elice's sparkling script plays with words the way Timbers and Rees' direction toys with stagecraft. Confusing dialogue is labeled a "nonversation." The native chieftain, Fighting Prawn, employs types of pasta as commands to his tribe. Mrs. Bumbrake, Molly's nanny- played by a man in drag in British pantomime tradition - uses alliteration in almost every sentence. Those are just a few examples of the vigorous verbiage. The text and direction merge perfectly to celebrate the concept of "play" in both the theatrical and childhood senses (40).

Without a doubt, the play's comedy is both clever and vastly entertaining, but by employing comedic devices such as casting a male to play Molly's tutor, Mrs. Bumbrake, in drag, recreating chief Fighting Prawn as a comical figure who speaks in types of pasta to command his tribe, and, most importantly, restructuring Black Stache as a ridiculous figure more obsessed with the state of his mustache than finding the starstuff, it renders the play no longer about Peter Pan's proposed origin; after playwright Rick Elice and directors get their hands on this Peter Pan "prequel," the production becomes less about the narrative itself and more about the magic of stagecraft and the comedic prowess of the actors.

I am in no way proposing that employing these techniques and changes to the original text renders *Peter and the Starcatcher* a poor production, but am instead arguing that by replacing narrative with brilliant stagecraft and comedic theatrical techniques we are bringing to light a change in the place of narrative in modern day culture. In *Peter and the Starcatcher,* the story itself is no longer as important as the production values. The staging, set, light, and sound designs themselves are brilliant in their minimalism, as Sheward explains:

> Thanks to a few props and Jeff Croiter's versatile lighting, Donyale Werle's charmingly rough-hewn set is transformed into a dozen locations, from a broken-down scow to a lush jungle. Yellow gloves become tropical birds, a rope transforms into a cramped ship's cabin, and, in one hysterical musical number, kitchen appliances adorn mermaids' costumes (40).

The audience is obviously willing to suspend their disbelief in the instances in which yellow gloves are tropical birds or that a rope is the boundary of a cramped ship cabin, but in instances in Barrie's original play when the "magic" that induces children to fly has no origin explanation, that suspension of belief becomes impossible, which is arguably why an origin story for Peter Pan was created in the first place—we as a culture need to know why and how something has occurred, therefore it is no longer just the mythical story that Barrie intended it to be. In the Victorian storytelling tradition that Barrie inherited, stories, whether mythical like *Peter Pan* or otherwise, included a clear message or moral. In *Peter and the Starcatcher*, the storytelling is ambiguous with no clear message or meaning that the viewer is meant to take away. The place of authorship is therefore lost, as *Peter and the Starcatcher* becomes a focus on the brilliance of

stagecraft and not on any kind of Peter Pan narrative, whether that is Barry and Pearson's or J.M. Barrie's.

Peter and the Starcatcher plays with gender in a way that its literary counterpart does not, connecting the tale closer to British theatrical tradition and even to Barrie's original stage version. Firstly, there are numerous occasions of cross-dressing in the production, most notably by the male actor who portrays Molly's governess, Mrs. Bumbrake, and by the entire cast (who are all male, save the actress who plays Molly) who dress as mermaids and perform a comical dance number to open act two. The casting of Mrs. Bumbrake, an older comic woman, as a man follows the cross-dressing nurse tradition found throughout British theatrical history. It is for this reason that I believe this technique can be interpreted not as a progressive gender statement, but as a nod to the British theatrical tradition of Barrie's own time. However, I believe that the mermaid dance number is doing something quite different, for it is not only the male cast members who don the sparkly fins and the seashell tops, but the entire cast, Molly included. Though the number is certainly comical and the goal is without a doubt to gain laughs, by all wearing the same mermaid costumes, the entire cast is united in this performance of gender. If it were meant to be a shallow, comic dance number the director could have easily placed only a few male characters in the costume, for it would have gained the same number of laughs. By connecting the entire cast in this campy mermaid number, a number that almost relates to *The Rocky Horror Show*'s "Rose Tint My World" in respect to unifying the male and female cast members in performative feminine costumes, *Peter and the Starcatcher* comes closer to sexual and gender ambiguity than any other Peter

Pan production since Mary Martin's performance and, perhaps, even since Barrie's original narrative. This choice also discontinues the Disney tradition furthered in *Peter and the Starcatchers* of the highly sexualized, feminine mermaids and even mocks the idea of the beautiful, womanly mermaid that has existed in literary tradition for centuries.

VI. Creating a "Dark" *Peter Pan*

Early twenty-first century *Peter Pan* creations saw the emergence of a "dark" Peter Pan trend. In these dark versions, Pan is an evil character who exists only to serve himself and who commits cruel, sometimes villainous acts. Numerous novel sequels were created with just this theme in mind: *Peter Pan in Scarlet* by Geraldine McCaughrean (2006), the only sequel authorized by the Great Ormond Street Hospital, which currently owns the rights to Peter Pan, describes a return to Neverland decades later by Wendy, John, and the Lost Boys to find a Peter who begins to transform into Captain Hook in personality and appearance. *The Child Thief* by Gerald Brom (2009) is an illustrated novel that creates a Peter who ruthlessly recruits children to join him and serve his own ends. *Another Pan* by Daniel Nayeri and Dina Nayeri (2010) recounts the tale of an eighteen-year-old Peter obsessed with finding magic bone dust so that he will never grow old. By creating a "dark" Peter Pan, authors are defining a previously ambiguous binary that Barrie establishes. The original Peter Pan exists, as Barrie believed most children to, between good and evil. Modern-day interpreters merely define another side of the typically chosen binary to categorize the liminal hero. By moving Peter Pan to the "dark side," modern interpreters also work actively against Disney, who presented Peter as an all good, albeit selfish, hero.

Though their Peter undoubtedly commits acts that could be interpreted as morally wrong, he is still the benevolent hero, rescuing damsels in distress and leading his "men" to victory. These dark, evil Peter Pans actively work against Disney's characterization, which effectively puts Disney and not Barrie in the place of the standard version of the story.

There is root for this classification of Peter Pan as a "dark" character in Barrie's text, for when Barrie created him he meant for him to embody all the goodness and all the wickedness of childhood. The best example of this is found in Chapter IV of *Peter and Wendy* when Peter and the Darling children undertake their long flight to Neverland:

> Certainly they [the Darling children] did not pretend to be sleepy, they were sleepy; and that was a danger, for the moment they popped off, down they fell. The awful thing was that Peter thought this funny.
>
> "There he goes again!" he would cry gleefully, as Michael suddenly dropped like a stone.
>
> "Save him, save him!" cried Wendy, looking with horror at the cruel sea far below. Eventually Peter would drive 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 until 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* 39).

In moments such as these, Peter presents the fickleness and cruelty of childhood. He is neither an altogether good or altogether bad being; he exists in a liminal state between the two, like most people, but he presents more extreme versions of the two binaries. Therefore, it is entirely conceivable within the world of the story for particular versions to push completely to one side of the binary of good/evil.

One of the most popular and most contemporary representations of a dark Peter Pan is found on ABC's television show, *Once Upon A Time*. ABC, a company

owned by Disney, premiered the contemporary world-meets-fairy tale television series in 2011, and in 2013 their season three adversary was none other than Peter Pan. This Peter Pan existed as a demon-like foe, who sold his own child (yes, this Peter was formerly an adult) in order to remain youthful forever. He possessed a dark "shadow" which detaches from him in order to leave Neverland and tempt children to return with it as Lost Boys. If the children will not come of their own accord, the Shadow takes them by force. Neverland itself is described as a terrible and perilous land ruled by Pan, and when night falls the cries of children who can never return to their homes are heard. This Pan kills for sport, rules the Lost Boys with an iron fist, and betrays followers and family alike.

This Peter Pan also did grow up; he had a child of his own but could not handle the responsibility of parenting and wished to remain forever a child. In order to do so, he had to give up the role of parent because his son would always remind him that he was not fully a child. His role as father to embrace a world of simulated childhood in Neverland and his son lived the rest of his life a fatherless child. In return, Pan gained a youthful appearance and immortality. At the end of the season, it is revealed that Peter Pan is the great-grandfather of the series' protagonist's son, Henry. Henry is described as having the "heart of the truest believer," which is an extremely powerful thing. Pan discovers this at a time when his immortality is waning and he needs a magical object to restore him. Pan knowingly kidnaps and tricks his great-grandson in order to kill Henry to possess the power of his heart. This demon-like Pan does not care for anyone, even his followers or family, and only seeks to help himself. Because *Once Upon a Time*'s Peter Pan runs away from his family and fatherhood responsibility, this version

of Peter Pan explains that the darkness in the narrative is child abandonment. *Once Upon A Time* presents men who refuse to grow up as the problem and proclaims that there is something inherently wrong and even evil about not growing up. In this way, this version is similar to Disney's *Peter Pan,* even if the Pan is a "dark" Peter Pan, because it argues that growing up is natural, expected, and correct. Disney's Wendy's flight of fancy that was her adventure with Peter Pan is contained in only one night, and after it ends she states that she is now ready to grow up. Disney argues that this is the natural cycle of things; children play at fantasy and have no responsibility, and adults must embrace the real world and their obligations in it. In a similar way, *Once Upon A Time,* by presenting a villainous Peter Pan who has shirked his adult responsibilities argues that not growing up is unnatural and the proper way of life must be practiced. Even though this modern-day version defines a binary on the opposite spectrum of Disney in respect to good/evil, it is still closer to Disney than it is to Barrie.

VII. Disney's Pan Becomes the Standard Version

When someone mentions "Peter Pan" today, one is most likely to think of one of two popular versions of the narrative, either Disney's 1953 *Peter Pan* animated film or the musical version that was made for and popularized by Mary Martin. However, after examining twenty-first century versions, both literary and on stage and film, it can be inferred that it is the Disney version and all that it stands for that has become the standard version of the story that subsequent versions either perpetuate or actively work against. Disney's *Peter Pan*'s objective was to define Barrie's ambiguous binaries, especially within the realms of gender,

and it is arguable that a truly ambiguous *Peter Pan* has not been performed or created since then. The closest that *Peter Pan* has come to true Barrie-esque ambiguity was Mary Martin's *Peter Pan* and the subsequent musical versions that have still had a female performer in the title role. However, many *Peter Pan* performances, both onstage and on film, have replaced a female Peter Pan with a male one. Notable film and television examples of this can be found in *Hook*, the 2003 *Peter Pan* film directed by P.J. Hogan, and on *Once Upon a Time*. On the stage, many of the Peters are not just being portrayed by young boys but by adult men. The role of Boy (who later becomes Peter) in *Peter and the Starcatcher* is played by an actor and many modern London performances of the play, most notably the performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company, have cast an adult man to play Peter. Therefore, in a way, modern productions have defined the gender binary in a way similar to Disney. When examined closely, it is revealed that modern audiences and interpreters of the story remain extremely uncomfortable with ambiguity in the *Peter Pan* narrative and seek to define it in a way almost similar to Disney.

Conclusion
"So it Will Go On, So Long as Children are Gay and Innocent and Heartless"

The boy who wouldn't grow up has captivated audiences and readers alike since Barrie in *The Little White Bird* labeled him as a "betwixt-and-between," (Barrie *The Little White Bird* 62). *Peter Pan* has remained a fixture in our culture since its creation more than a century ago because both the central character and many aspects of Barrie's narrative itself exist in a liminal, unclassifiable state. This liminality has permitted many different interpretations to push one side of a particular opposing binary in order to perpetuate a cultural, social, or political message. The three periods that I examined are periods of immense cultural discomfort. During and post-World War I, Peter Pan was first used to propagate the "great adventure" warfare could bring. Post World War II in a time of extreme social and political change, Disney saw that clear gender roles needed to be defined and used their *Peter Pan* film as a tool. And during the twenty-first century, dark Peter Pan narratives emerged to bring light to a cultural discomfort regarding millenials that elder generations feel are not growing up fast enough For over one hundred years, *Peter Pan* has been used as a tool and been cultural reappropriated to serve a particular purpose. There seems to be no end of this trend on the horizon, for new versions of the story are continuingly being created. In fact, a new film describing the origin story of Peter Pan entitled *Pan* is currently in pre-production and set to begin filming in 2015 (IMDb). It seems inevitable that Barrie's story will "go on forever and ever" just as Barrie said Peter himself would in *Peter and Wendy,* as new creators use the story's ambiguous

nature to shape particular binaries for new cultural purposes (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 159).

However, it is interesting to note that being unclassifiable seems to be particularly dangerous to modern day audiences and interpreters of the story. There is not a version today that has been able to embrace *Peter Pan*'s liminal state fully, which reveals that we as a culture are uncomfortable with the ambiguity that this story establishes. There is great discomfort, especially in the realm of gender fluidity, where this classic story is concerned. When rewriting the narrative, the impulse is to write it conservatively. No transgressive *Peter Pan* exists today in mainstream popular culture. There is no feminist or gay rewriting of *Peter Pan* even though there is certainly justification for both in Barrie's original text. Why is this? Perhaps it is because *Peter Pan* has entered into the realm of classic fairy tales and children's stories, and many rewriters of the story assume that that is reason enough to not rework certain aspects. Perhaps it is, because it is classified as a children's story, that rewriters attribute childishness to purity or innocence regarding such themes. This would be a grievous misinterpretation of the story to Barrie, who chose to illustrate both the innocence and the wickedness of children in his creation of Peter Pan. One almost does an injustice to the story by embracing certain ambiguities but masking others that we are less comfortable with.

I believe that, in addition to operating as a cultural instrument to perpetuate certain cultural or social views, *Peter Pan* has also functioned as mirror. Every time a new version of the story was created, it illuminated something about the culture that was creating it. In the previous chapters, I

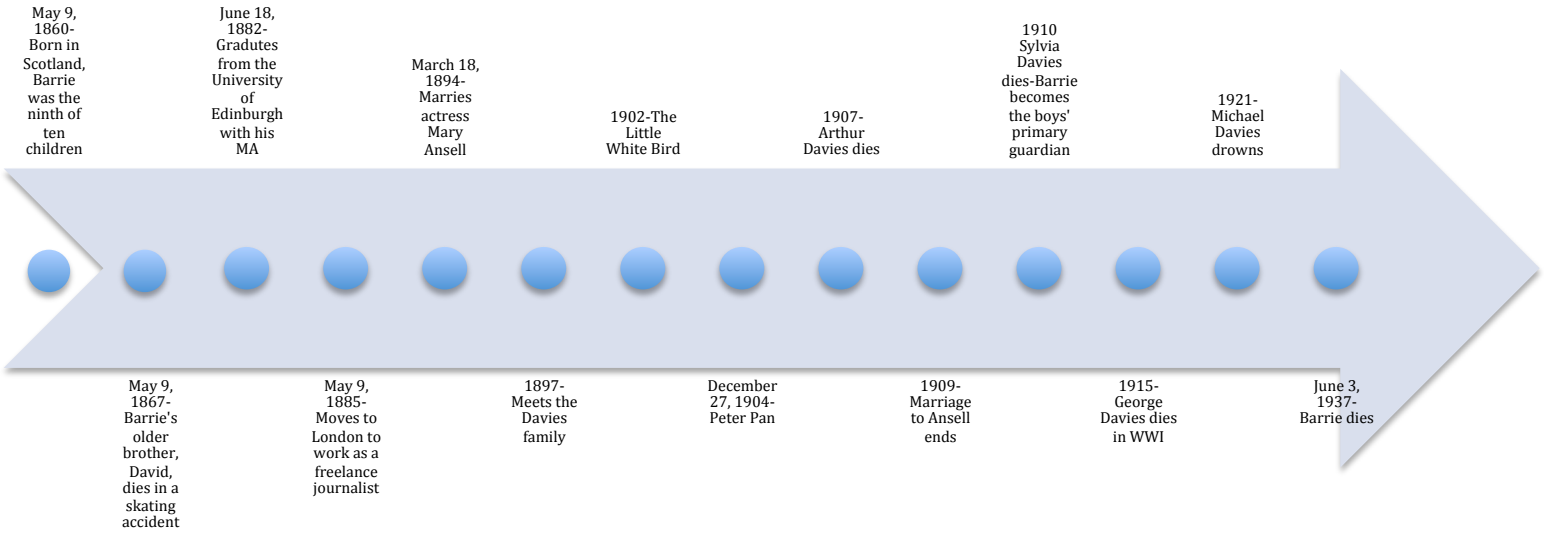
explained first that *Peter Pan* was written by Barrie to deal with the complexities of his own character and later reappropriated for the war effort, second that Mary Martin's *Peter Pan* embraced certain ambiguities of Barrie's original text, especially in the realm of gender, while Disney's film sought to define them, and lastly that Dave Barry and Ridley Pearson's origin story *Peter and the Starcatchers* both perpetuated and worked against Disney as the standard retelling of the story while other "dark" Peter Pan narratives sought to distance themselves from Disney but instead brought themselves closer by punishing the deviant Pan by making him exist as a demon, villain, or outsider. All of these examinations illuminate particular characteristics about the culture that is creating and viewing these new interpretations. It shows one what was accepted during this time, what was considered deviant behavior, and what the place of narrative was in the culture. These categories are constantly in flux, which leads to the realization that there will certainly be many more "new" Peter Pans to join the canon.

Perhaps, to answer a question I posed in the introduction, the aspect that draws us as a culture most to Peter Pan is not simply the allure of childhood and remaining young forever, but the fascination with his constantly altering state. He is impossible to pin down and define; he eludes one as he flits about the nursery of our minds, as light as air and as fast as the winds that carry him from London to Neverland to America to literature to the stage to film and back to Neverland again. His indefinability invites countless interpretations that attempt to discover his true nature, but he eludes them yet again, remaining just out of reach. Just as Martin's Peter Pan, in the song "I Won't Grow Up," proclaims

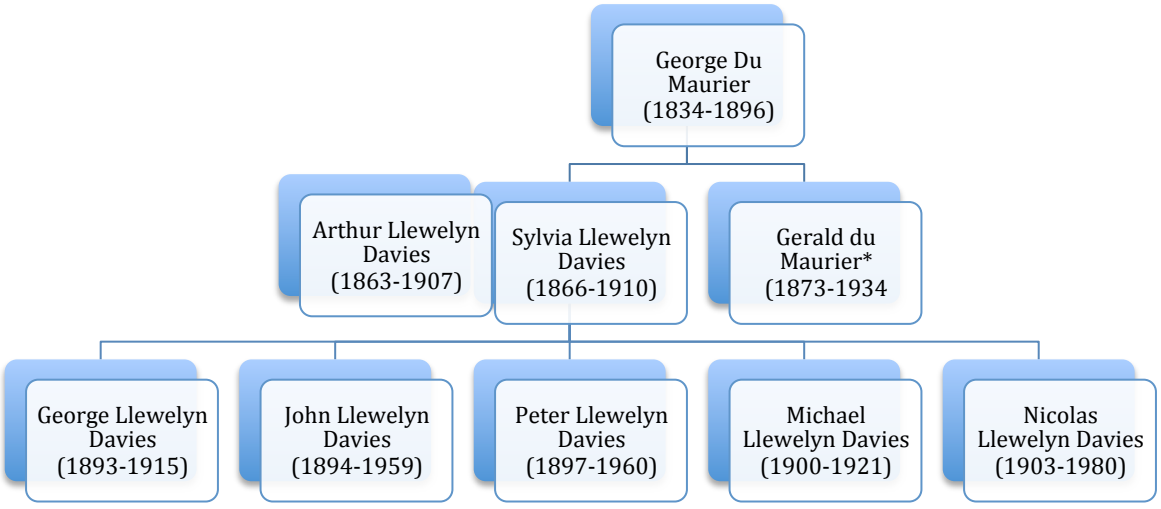
“catch me if you can!” Peter invites us to do so as well, going on forever and ever, just as Barrie intended he would, as long as we remain “gay and innocent and heartless” (Barrie *Peter and Wendy* 159).

Appendix

J.M. Barrie's Biography Timeline



The Llewelyn Davies Family Tree



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*Gerald du Maurier portrayed Captain Hook and Mr. Darling in the original *Peter Pan* production (Birkin 109-110).

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Figure 1 


Figure 2