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Peter and Wendy: Cultural References from British Literature and Beyond

Isabel Lopes Coelho¹

ABSTRACT

Peter and Wendy, written by J. M. Barrie and published as a novel in 1911, is one of the most iconic works of English literature. This article aims to elucidate references that appear in Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* which make it so fantastic and unpaired: the literary and the sociocultural references, which contribute to tag this book as an English "modern classic". The references that are well-known by the British reader provoke an immediate sense of belonging and recognition. For instance, sociocultural mentions can easily be noticed throughout the narrative, especially the ones that bring to the reader aspects from Edwardian and Victorian everyday life of British families. Regarding the literary references, the reader might find aspects from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Stevenson's *The Treasure Island*, Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Alice in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll). Or even from *The Secret Garden* (Frances Hodgson Burnett) and *The Wind in the Willows* (Kenneth Grahame), both works that are contemporary with *Peter and Wendy*, and are also conversing with it, particularly in terms of the notion of escapism and social criticism. Above all, Barrie's novel opens a new field for the modern literature of the twentieth century. A literature that is more concerned with the psychological features of the characters, contributing to the emerging of a new narrative aimed at children, young readers and – why not – adults. This article uses the concept of "family romance" proposed by critic Marthe Robert in order to establish the connection between Barrie's texts and those of other writers.

KEY WORDS: *Peter and Wendy*, J. M. Barrie, Escapism, Edwardian literature, Family novel.

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J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* is a cutting-edge novel for all kinds of readers and still today intrigues researchers. No doubt, its success comes from the accelerated pace of the narrative combined with the softer and deeper conflicts the characters must face during their journey. It is impossible for the reader not to relate emotionally to the characters, to feel empathy and, in a certain way, to be humanized by the dilemmas faced by the characters. There is, however, another aspect, which is almost subliminal and yet largely present throughout the book, which contributes to the creation of this feeling of empathy. Barrie, as an intellectual and a lover of literature, filled the work with references from classics of English literature and customs of British people, creating a pleasant feeling of well-being through the recognition of day-to-day life. Defoe, Stevenson, Shakespeare and English afternoon tea – just a few examples – are heritage items subtly recalled in the pages of this profound and revealing story, disguised as an adventure novel. This article attempts to elucidate some of these references, bringing to light literary connections and socio-cultural aspects of the Victorian and Edwardian universe.

AN ISLAND TO CALL MY OWN: ROBINSON CRUSOE AND PETER PAN

The theme of the journey, to start, is a very important aspect of *Peter and Wendy*, and even determines the destiny of the main characters – it also points to some key features for the comprehension of the narrative. One fine example is the scene in which Wendy convinces her brothers and the lost boys to return to London from Neverland, and Peter Pan is the only one to resist the girl's appeals. Certain that his real mother would not be expecting him, Peter refuses to return to the objective world and to embrace the responsibilities of ordinary life. Wendy and the boys' journey, thus, comes at a painful price:

To show that her departure would leave him unmoved, he skipped up and down the room, playing gaily on his heartless pipes. She had to run about after him, though it was rather undignified.

'To find your mother,' she coaxed.

Now, if Peter had ever quite had a mother, he no longer missed her. He could do very well without one. He had thought them out, and remembered only their bad points.

‘No, no,’ he told Wendy decisively; ‘perhaps she would say I was old, and I just want always to be a little boy and to have fun’. (Barrie 170)

In the excerpt above, behind the arrogance of Peter Pan, the most feared boy in Neverland, hides a child with no mother, whose resistance to return to London lies in his fear of rejection. After many years of living on the island, Peter believes that he has already been replaced by another child. To avoid this pain, Peter selects only the bad memories of his family and creates for himself a universe where he is the driving force of this particular world where he lives independently, and in which adults are his mortal enemies.

For the reasons described above, Peter Pan can be considered the eternal Lost Child of what the critic Marthe Robert calls a “family romance” (111): the maneuver of creating fables from fading and selective memories of someone’s childhood. In this sense, by neglecting his mother, Peter builds his utopian universe with rules that only he can make and break, according to his own narcissistic desire. But then, he fills loneliness with imagination. Peter Pan, in this sense, is the “evolution” of the “family romance” to the “oedipal social romance”, according to Robert’s typology.

English literature is already familiar with characters who give up their world of origin to build their own sandcastles. Robinson Crusoe, for instance, leaves as a hero with the intention of never returning, with the aim of breaking his emotional ties and rebuilding his life. He is the hero of himself, his past does not exist; only present and future are part of his story. Daniel Defoe’s novel, published in 1719, narrates in first person the adventures of Crusoe in such an ingenious and realistic way that the work was almost considered to be the real account of a castaway. The importance of Robinson Crusoe for the shaping of English literature can be summed up in one concept: the robinsonade. The novel itself is responsible for an entire genre, a lineage of adventure narratives that instilled in the English the pride of exploring the seas and creating the image of a hegemonic England.

But it is not just through the theme of journey that Crusoe and Pan connect. There is a deeper relationship deriving from the idea of “family romance” proposed by Robert. From their neurotic memories of rejection, both decide to be absolute orphans, keeping those who abandoned

them within the fable symbolically, a fable created by their selected memories. Both become icons of independence, but they will suffer a kind of punishment for their actions, such as complete isolation and the danger of falling into oblivion. Therefore, both distance themselves from the mythical figure of the traveling hero who returns home and reconciles with society, to remain children of no one, “the absolute orphan, the absolute loner, who engenders himself in all purity in the perfect desert kingdom” (Robert 102). They both reject the “family ideal”, as described above. Both Crusoe and Peter Pan set out to never return, to be kings in their own perfect and deserted kingdoms on their faraway islands. They are “no one’s children” and feel no remorse in abandoning - and even hating - those who were once their family members.

There is, however, a noticeable difference between the two heroes. For, if Crusoe secretly longs for death, Pan, on the other hand, worships life, adventure, the excitement of living in the present, and only in the present. Death, for Pan, is “an awfully big adventure,” not a wish. Being a castaway, then, for both Crusoe and Peter Pan, becomes challenging for one reason only: for accepting and dealing with loneliness. In order to free himself from responsibility, Peter takes his beliefs to the ultimate consequences, even if it means facing his friends’ misreading him and isolation. This sentiment becomes evident when Peter punishes adults (another “family romance” remark) for Wendy’s decision to return to London:

This dread made her forgetful of what must be Peter’s feelings, and she said to him rather sharply, ‘Peter, will you make the necessary arrangements?’

‘If you wish it’, he replied, as coolly as if she had asked him to pass the nuts.

Not so much as a sorry-to-lose-you between them! If she did not mind the parting, he was going to show her, was Peter, that neither did he.

But of course he cared very much; and he was so full of wrath against grown-ups, who, as usual, were spoiling everything, that as soon as he got inside his tree he breathed intentionally quick short breaths at the rate of about five to a second. He did this because there is a saying in the Neverland that, every time you breathe, a grown-up dies; and Peter was killing them off vindictively as fast as possible. (Barrie 167)

The above excerpt highlights the complexity of character construction. Peter Pan puts on a show for Wendy, acting cynically, implying that he doesn't care about the return of his friends when, inwardly, he feels angry and takes revenge, cruelly, on the adults who once again make him suffer. This will not be the first time Peter Pan experiences a sense of pleasure in killing. Violence, against others and against himself, is the only virile proof of his manhood, yet is also a picture of his immaturity. Again, Robert's beautiful words about Robinson Crusoe can be borrowed to understand Pan: "The castaway who must punish him is both the instrument of his deliverance, a victory over death, and a purification, a rebirth in which the anguish of abandonment is incessantly rocked by the drunkenness of the fresh start" (Robert 103). Just as Crusoe's wreck represents punishment and liberation, Neverland represents Peter's liberation from an exhausting routine as well as a life condemned to endless work. While Defoe's character represents the brave Englishman set out to colonize and spread English culture to unknown lands, Barrie's hero makes a point of refusing the established Victorian life, the working middle-class and a childhood that prepares little citizens to be bankers, lawyers, doctors with no time for fun. This aspect makes *Peter and Wendy* a cutting-edge narrative, setting a new paradigm for children's literature for the twentieth century: the right to be a child, the right to choose one's own future, to write one's own story. But Barrie does it with heavy criticism, showing that every choice has its own burden, for Peter is imprisoned in a life doomed to frivolity. It is no coincidence that Peter acknowledges his existence only when he repeats the ritual of summoning Wendy every summer –as well as her daughter and her granddaughter, to continue the same games in Neverland in an eternal present. Peter Pan thus becomes a wandering figure, a wandering entity that eventually falls into oblivion of those who "can still hear the sound of the turf, though we shall land no more", as the narrator says (Barrie 74).

Neverland, thus, becomes the place of the fable of Robert's "family romance", gains materiality, and becomes the fantasy of the real. Although Peter Pan's fabled strategy is extremely original as a narrative resource in Barrie's text, other contemporary narratives have appropriated the same resource as a refuge for their child characters.

THE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN INFLUENCES: ALICE AND PETER

At the end of the nineteenth century, the literary phenomenon of “escapism” emerged to create a new paradigm of children’s literature and to distance itself from the utilitarian culture of the time. It was an escape to an uncertain place where the shadow of Victorian and Edwardian moral idealism could be set aside, even for a better understanding of the child’s reality. Such places have also become iconic in children’s literature, marking a new era in their literary production at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.

The pioneering works that stood out from the Victorian and Edwardian classics brought innovation in their narrative strategies with the creation of imaginary places, combining fantasy with a possible understanding of children’s reality, in its most subjective aspects. These places, rather than mirror the scenarios that imitated adulthood, now guided the narrative to places where adults were practically absent or, if present, usually represented a negative influence.

However, the conflict in Barrie’s novel is built between the opposing desires of Peter and Wendy, because she represents the Victorian values as a character. Her make-believe in Neverland recreate her parents’ life, the cozy house, the attentive mother, the working father, the happy children playing together. Wendy plays (her “family romance”) as if she was imitating the life that she is being prepared for. For example, when Wendy sits in her chair after tea to darn socks and watch the boys play while she waits for Peter to come home (Barrie 125), she is playing a typical Edwardian family scene. The attentive reader, in turn, will note that the entire chapter, and the following one, are devoted to imitating the domestic life of an English family at the turn of the century. The details of the imaginary cups of tea, the ways of serving and sitting at the table, the storytelling itself and the bedtime rituals are customs of the everyday life of most middle-class families, at least in London. Wendy brings back the scenery of Edwardian life for the lost boys and Peter Pan as a treasure to be preserved. The reader recognizes this instantly; the connection between fantasy and the objective world is very thin, and it becomes progressively harder to determine the lines that separate fiction from the objective world.

By recreating a family atmosphere with such dramatic precision, Barrie invites the reader to

look at his own home life in what Zipes called, the “metacommentary,” on English family relations. It is also noted that it is a representation of an absolutely bourgeois domestic life; the characters are concerned with clothes, experience a bucolic closeness to nature, preserve the cherished rites of daily life such as “tucking the children to sleep” (with the premise that the family has time to take care of children and develop a relationship with them). At other times in the story, especially in the first chapters in the children’s room, the famous nursery, one may note the arrangement of furniture and objects that evoke a typical Victorian house.

Although the Tea Time scene in Barrie’s novel is created to highlight Peter’s characteristics in contrast to the objective world (represented by Wendy), this image has already been used in another British children’s classic in order to criticize society. Lewis Carroll’s *The Mad Tea Party* represents all the crazy Victorian rules that make sense to no one, or only to the Mad Hatter. The meaningless and confused conversation—as through the eyes of a child—, Time set as a social convention—and not as a principle of the Universe—, the lack of politeness, everything that happens in that brief scene in *Alice in Wonderland* causes the reader to laugh at its own conventions.

NOT SO IMAGINARY PLACES: NEVERLAND, SECRET GARDEN AND THE RIVER BANK

Although Barrie’s and Carroll’s novels have this Victorian criticism trait in common, the works share significant differences. Carroll’s novel proposes a fantastic world in which the heroine is tested countless times until the narrative takes her to the limit of her existence in Wonderland. Then, the novel ends by questioning the existence of this fantastic sphere when Alice wakes up from a dream—or a nightmare. For Wendy, Neverland is a place of connection with the children and her inner fantasy, her well-being, her possible worlds. In this sense, other works, contemporary to *Peter and Wendy*, propose utopian places whose function is to create a physical space for childhood, away from the rules of an adult world, in such a way that the child recognizes and solves their internal conflicts. This is true for the Darling brothers and the lost boys, as well as for Mary Lennox in Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *The Secret Garden* (1911), Kenneth Grahame’s Mole and Rat in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), and even Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (1900).

Mary Lennox, for example, is nothing like the heroines from nineteenth-century girls' books. An orphan, Mary is adopted by a dysfunctional middle-class family. But instead of developing a sense of anger, rebellion or even victimization, Mary feels lost in the world because she cannot access her own identity. *The Secret Garden* is considered one of the earliest psychological novels for children, in which the character's conflict does not arise from issues outside her, but rather from her own unconscious. In this way, Mary is far removed from the passive female figures of fairy tales or novels' obedient school girls. Even the religious references present in the novel aim to subvert the traditional way orphan girls and "good girls" are characterized (Hunt VIII).

Mary's secret garden—which connects to Neverland because of its function in the novel—is precisely the "physical place" of the novel where the character can take refuge from the objective world to access her consciousness without the presence of adults and pre-established judgments. Another feature of Burnett's work that connects directly to Barrie's novel is the character Dickon, a wild, nature-minded boy who plays his flute and lives in the secret garden. Peter Pan comes to Kensington Gardens precisely to protect the children and also to propose games to distract them. It would appear that the garden is the space that connects novels from the early twentieth century, which offers a more introspective reading through characters who experience personal conflicts. In this sense, these places represent the "Eden of the soul, the enchanted place of the poetic imagination" (Wullschläger 106).

Just as Carroll was responsible for a paradigm shift in children's books, Barrie and Grahame are the exponents of young twentieth-century literature whose purpose is to refine the relationship of the objective world to the "alternative realities."

Grahame, in turn, also flirts in his works with the idea of a reality parallel to the objective world, especially in the period known as the Golden Age (1895), in his masterpiece *The Wind in the Willows*. During the Golden Age there was already a reference to a utopian place that could be accessed by the imagination, but it would be in *The Wind in the Willows* that the idea of "escapism" would come to dominate the narrative. There is, however, a noticeable difference between Grahame's novel and his contemporaries'. In *The Wind in the Willows*, the utopian place is not a

magical garden or any other fantastic place, instead, it is a real river in the objective world. The adventure of escapism takes place as a true voyage down the river that really exists in the objective world. Grahame “fuses” the objective world with an alternative reality, even though his book is purely fantastic, by anthropomorphizing characters as in fables (Carpenter 155).

Grahame’s intention, however, with the writing of *The Wind in the Willows*, also raises controversies very similar to those in *Peter and Wendy*. Due to the political references in the text, the presence of scenes and conflicts of characters that have already reached maturity, many critics have assumed the work had been written with an adult audience in mind. In the recently published *The Making of The Wind in the Willows*, Peter Hunt retraces the origins of the text from the standpoint of comparative literature and states that,

Like other famous children’s books — such as *Alice’s Adventure in Wonderland*, *The Hobbit* and *Treasure Island* — it started life as a story for a particular child, and this shows most in the opening chapter. Like all these books, *The Wind in the Willows* grew in the writing and ended up as something quite different from, and something much more complex than, a bedtime story. But whereas *Alice’s Adventures* is a children’s book that can be read by adults, *The Wind in the Willows* is an adult’s book that can be read by children. This is because (and this also accounts for its relative lack of international success) its landscapes and cultural references are deeply embedded in Edwardian England — whereas Alice moves in a detached world of fantasy, and the many period references in that book are hidden in the background. (15)

Peter Hunt points out a new question, a very interesting one, with a lot of potential for deeper reflection, and which deserves an article of its own: the fact that some works read by children were actually written with an adult audience in mind. Intuitively, Barrie creates a novel with a dual audience when the narrator says that “we too” (as adults) “have been there; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more” (Barrie 74). Barrie continues with British literary tradition which already had similar examples, as in works by Robert Louis Stevenson and C. S. Lewis:

British children’s literature, in particular, has a rich tradition of crossover literature. Even works whose titles specify their implied reader have found an adult audience. Although

written for children, Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verse*, published in 1885, was also popular with their parents. The collection of poetry includes such well-known favorites as "My Shadow" and "The Lamplighter". The subtitle *A Story for Children*, certainly did not deter adult readers of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first volume of C. S. Lewis's famous crossover *The Chronicles of Narnia*. J. M. Barrie's goal was to appeal to both adults and children when he wrote the stage play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* in 1904. (Beckett 88)

Once again, the dual audience is a very complex and interesting issue and should be explored in a more consistent way. Nevertheless, it is important to present it here, even if briefly, in order to recall the spirit of the time.

A TIME TO REMEMBER: REVISITING FARIES AND PIRATES

Barrie's narrative strategy does not merely respond to the time period when he was writing. On the contrary, references to classical English literature create another level of reading the novel. The active English culture, responsible for drawing the reader's empathy, includes the traditional fairy tales that have populated childhood imagery for decades—such as Wendy's quote from "Cinderella" in the chapter "Wendy's Story". This allusion may be present in Wendy's stories, but also in so many other stories already told in literature, disguised—or retold—by Barrie and scattered throughout the play and the novel. There are numerous references in *Peter Pan* from other works of English literature. There are pirate stories that turned into oral legends, references to nautical adventure books, such as the most obvious one perhaps: Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Charles Dicken's *Holiday Romance*, all the Native Americans culture celebrated by Fenimore Cooper, and two other "Peters" present in English literature: Peter Wilkins - who has the ability to fly—and Peter Schlemihl—who also has an accompanying shadow.

Perhaps the most allegorical reference to English tradition in Barrie's masterpiece is, in fact, the play *Peter Pan* itself and its distant but noticeable relationship with Shakespeare's works, which strengthens the viewer's feeling of being in front of a truly English reference. As a play, *Peter Pan* brings elements of two Shakespearean plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Fantasy, the

possibility of alternate worlds, characters from parallel universes and times, the uncertainty of reality put to the test in a dream world, all are points of contact between Shakespeare's plays—the most beloved of the late nineteenth century precisely for such characteristics—and Barrie's work. Lerer (260) even states that parts of Shakespeare's works had a direct influence on the construction of Barrie's narrative. For example, Peter's entry into the children's room: "Peter's entrance resembles the images of a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'As far as he is dressed in autumn leaves and cobwebs', as one of Oberon's fairies (remember, one of them was 'Spider's Web'), Peter arrives to haul morale out of everyday life." Or when he claims that the Darling brothers' play by imitating father and mother in a kind of make-believe that resembles Prince Hal's speech to Falstaff in the play *Henry VI* ("Stand you for my father?"). This is a game that connects with Wendy's in the underground house. The appeal, therefore, of Barrie's play to the public is largely due to the strength of references from the intellectual collective memory of English literate society and the construction of the *tableaux* of life.

It must be pointed out, however, that *Peter and Wendy* should not be considered a commentary on the past. Barrie's work sits on the threshold between the Edwardian period and the twentieth century, and its focus, as stated earlier, is to represent the yearnings of the individual, and no longer his representation within the collective. By rescuing the imminent past for the viewer and reader, Barrie designs mature children's literature for the future. Still today, criticism delights in trying to fill in gaps in a narrative that does not underestimate the reader, whoever it may be. In this sense, Peter Hollindale makes a very interesting comment when he points out that:

Barrie is very much a twentieth-century writer for children. He anticipates developments in children's literature which have since achieved more sophisticated, and perhaps more appropriate, forms. At times in the Peter Pan stories his narrative commuting between child and adult appears to involve an act of trespass... into an emotional terrain which ought to be untouched. (XIX)

Hollindale emphasizes that Barrie's style and narrative strategy belong to twentieth-century writers, not to the continuity of a previous century's tradition. Barrie's sophistication is closer to a complex, and unsettling narrative that would be developed in subsequent decades.

IT'S OWN REFERENCE

For the reading public and the spectator in the theater, Peter Pan made his debut in the 1904 play *Peter Pan, or the boy who wouldn't grow up*. The original script, written and rewritten approximately six times, was immediately accepted by producer and friend Charles Frohman, who booked the Duke of York theater, where the play was first staged on December 27, 1904. Barrie was already a renowned playwright and writer when *Peter Pan* went public, but the play's success made him even more well-known and acclaimed, both artistically and financially. The play became an immediate success because of its unique staging. Peter Pan, played by actress Nina Boucicault, flew around the stage in a system of pulleys and cables, while the audience of adults and children marveled at the effect on stage. There was also the pantomime appeal in the scene where Tinkerbell is about to die and Peter calls on the audience to clap in order to resurrect the fairy. The play immediately won tours across Europe and the United States, and became a symbol of London's Christmas festivities, having been staged uninterrupted every year until after Barrie's death (Birkin 65).

It became evident, therefore, that Peter Pan needed to appear in book form and his debut in the literary world came in 1906, with the publication of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, which was nothing more than excerpts from *The Little White Bird*, with illustrations by Arthur Rackham. It was not until 1911 that Peter Pan, Neverland, the Darling brothers and all the fantastic characters created by Barrie would appear in a novel whose narrative emphasized the relationship between Peter Pan and Wendy. Not by chance, the novel's first title was simply *Peter and Wendy*.

The fact that the text was conceived as a play before the novel certainly helped the book gain the success it still enjoys today. *Peter Pan* changed the editorial marketing landscape, although it was only published in 1928 as a screenplay. Several editions of the novel came out with color illustrations or collectible editions—driven by the advancement of printing technology by changing the concept of a cheap book to a beautiful one—. Unwritten works were also published such as Barrie's *Peter Pan Keepsake* and *Alice Woodward*, Daniel S. O'Connor's *The Peter Pan Picture Book* (both from 1907), and books from the Peter Pan universe such as *The Peter Pan Alphabet Book*, written by O. Henford in 1909. Even a kind of “behind the scenes” phenomenon such as *Peter Pan, his Book, his Pictures, his*

Career, his Friends (1909), written by GD Drennan, created a merchandising around the book that the publishing market had not even seen with *Alice in Wonderland*. The “phenomenon” Peter Pan, even hit English schools that recommended an adapted version of the work by removing excerpts such as “I don’t want to go to school and learn solemn things ... I don’t want to be a man” in 1915, creating precisely the opposite effect to what Barrie sought, to circumvent the mainstream with ready-made ideas. In the words of Zipes (238), who analyzes the moment: “Ironically, the imaginative spirit that Barrie created to oppose institutionalization became institutionalized and commercialized fully throughout the twentieth century.” Like most media phenomenon, the complex essence of *Peter and Wendy* gradually faded into adaptations for theater, cinema, and even editions reworked by Barrie.

CONCLUSION

As a character in an adventure novel, Peter Pan is remembered as a rebellious boy who does not like to go to school, who offers the Darling brothers incredible adventures in a magical place called Neverland, and whose biggest rival is a pirate named Captain Hook. In fact, as Peter himself believed, time was not at all beneficial, it only distanced him from the complex layers of his character, consequently transforming the novel into a more palatable work for a larger public, less demanding, and perhaps less concerned with dealing with the complexities of intimate spheres. The importance of *Peter and Wendy* resides in having been able to break various paradigms of children’s literature. Peter represents a rebelliousness against the behavior expected from a “model child” after years of Victorian upbringing. He is the savage boy who sets a boundary between the place where childhood is (this place materialized in Neverland) and the expectations from the adult world (in this case, the city of London and the Darling’s family house). Through his own imagination, he brings the concept of “family romance” to reality, turning the traumatic memories of his early childhood into a fantasy world, refusing to be a part of established society. Peter is born into the twentieth century as one of the most daring characters in children’s literature. Peter refused a life of comfort and wealth to live an uncertain life, full of danger and pleasure—or “antagonism between material concerns, on the one hand, and what we can call, on the other, a complex spiritual universe” (Prince 66). Peter is a kind of Rousseauian Adam who acts according to his desires and impulses regardless

of the “adult-organized society.” This is a narcissistic aspect common in heroes in the “family romance.”

Neverland, in this context, in addition to fostering total separation between the universe of the child and the adult, also represents a space in children’s literature, necessary for a child’s growth. Neverland can be compared to Wonderland, Secret Garden, The River Bank as places where the child escapes from objective reality in order to connect with the most inner self, setting a new kind of character in children’s literature. These are characters that are not dichotomous, that are complex and have to face their own challenges.

A century after its creation, *Peter and Wendy* remains a work that reflects humanity’s longings, as its value lies not exactly in the development of the adventure plot—as the work is also considered an adventure novel—but rather in the relationships that spur characters to act on their beliefs, desires and their own ethics. This, remains undoubtedly one of the key points for the consolidation of the work within the twentieth century canon, even though its transgression was eventually reduced to a simple fairy tale.

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