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Exploring Gender, Sexuality and Identity Formation in Works about

Peter Pan

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Abstract

This study focuses on works that revolve around Peter Pan, which include: James Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1904), Walt Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Return to Neverland* (2002), and Damion Dietz's *Neverland* (2003). The central aim is to analyze these works both individually and comparatively to show how complex the development of gender roles, sexuality and identity is during adolescence. Moreover, I will examine the consequences that a poor nurturing environment and an inadequate growth of such aspects could have for a series of characters, who may even be led to what seems a fatal loss of identity. The theoretical framework adopted goes from Freud and Piaget's psychological research on children, to Wasko's sociological analysis of Walt Disney and other critics in the fields of LGBT and Queer Studies (e.g. Butler). The conclusions I have reached provide an interpretation the general public may not be familiar with, which include: reflections on Peter Pan's demonic nature, Neverland's horrors, the complexity of children's literature and how the media manipulates our perception of female characters.

Introduction

Peter Pan was born in the imaginative mind of the British writer James Barrie. He created novels and plays, like *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906) or *The Little White Bird* (1902), with the boy who-wouldn't-grow-up as the main character. Even though his oeuvre is aimed at and focuses thematically on children, adult audiences have also been hypnotized and charmed by the mysterious flying child. Classic children's literature shares such qualities: a rich imagination, fun adventures and the empathic coming of age of the young protagonists are appealing for children while the profound connotations, elaborated style and double meanings enchant their parents. Therefore, many children's novels have reached the status of classics in universal literature for obvious reasons; the complexity of creating a work that is suitable and inspiring for both children and adults is undeniable. However, the general public usually underestimates this field which includes masterpieces such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1881-1882), Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1880) or Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1904). Most of us would not even frame them within the scope of children's literature due to our misconceptions; nonetheless, the genre is rich and should be held in high regard.

The features mentioned above have always drawn my attention to those captivating novels and their hidden meanings. One would never imagine the dark images that *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883) conceals within its pages because no one would expect that in a children's book¹. As an undergraduate student of English, the subject *Filosofía e literatura* gave me the chance to analyze the philosophy of a book of

¹ Such images include: a suicidal little girl who is waiting for her coffin and who turns out to be the Blue Fairy; Pinocchio smacking a cricket —the personification of his morality—; and Pinocchio's donkey eaten alive by fishes.

my choice and I felt it was my opportunity to explore children's literature. Surprisingly, I found that there are not many studies on Peter Pan; my adventures with him started then. The Freudian schools we studied in *Literatura inglesa e a sua crítica* inspired me to provide a psychological approach in my research while subjects like *Literatura inglesa e xénero*, *Variedades do inglês* and *Literatura postcolonial* opened the path of Gender Studies for me. I, in fact, chose *Peter and Wendy* from among Barrie's massive oeuvre due to the strong presence of female characters. Finally, thanks to *Literatura norteamericana* I acquired some techniques for a better comprehension and analysis of texts through close-reading.

Moreover, *Peter and Wendy* belongs to the Golden age of children's literature that took place at the turn of the nineteenth century. The texts written during this period possess an extra allure due to their massive influence in popular culture. The Western world has interpreted, transformed and deconstructed the essence of Peter Pan. Such an omnipresent cultural symbol drove me to include a reflection on how several versions of the classic have used and elucidated the figure of the boy-who-would-not-grow-up. I wanted to take a step further and thus selected works from two countries, contrasting periods and different formats; taking the British novel as a starting point I also selected Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Return to Neverland* (2002), and Damion Dietz's *Neverland* (2003), which are three American movies that represent really different realities. *Peter Pan* and *Return to Neverland* belong to the omnipotent Disney empire, whose films reach millions of children and adults from all around the world; furthermore, the company counts with almost unlimited resources and a wide working crew and portrays a studied and, at first sight, politically correct image. Even so, Disney movies bury secrets we would never imagine. The two movies represent two eras separated by fifty years and a clear change of mind and attitude. On the other hand,

Neverland stands for the most alternative side of cinema, opposite to Disney in various ways —with its low budget it pays more attention to a meaningful script than visual effects, for instance— but with a lot to offer; indie cinema usually portrays a more personal and liberal way of thinking and understanding art and symbolizes the less known side of America.

I then became excited about my final project because it allowed me to explore works of art from America and Great Britain which conveyed some of my passions: fantastic and children's literature, psychology, Gender Studies and cinema. After re-reading and re-watching my sources I set my aims, which are mainly two: firstly, I will unmask the complexity of Barrie's novel by showing the intrinsic and greatly convoluted processes that take place during childhood related to gender, sexuality and identity in the works derived from his oeuvre; secondly, I will analyze the consequences of severe damages in the development of the self through several characters in different versions of Barrie's classic —e.g. Peter's unresolved Oedipus complex. During the writing of this project, I could reaffirm my initial belief that Peter Pan's suffering during childhood evolves into psychological, physical, sexual and behavioral trauma later in his life. This may lead him into a permanent limbo state in which he loses any contact with reality; he is so lost that is not even able to construct a healthy identity. Other characters, especially the male adults and the female ones in general, substantially present great depth at psychological and sexual levels as well. The way women are portrayed in the world of Peter Pan is filled with contradictions: female characters intended to be wicked have been embraced as feminist idols while the character intended to be the heroine, Wendy, has been rejected since she is plain and unappealing. For me, making this study has been a way to revisit the interpretation of gender roles and exploring if the audience has accepted or rejected them.

By means of proving my aims I have divided my final project into three chapters, each focusing on one or two of the already mentioned works and using different theories as cornerstone. The first chapter starts with an in-depth analysis of the character of Peter Pan in *Peter and Wendy*, the original source. I believe it is crucial to understand the actual foundation of the epic figure by close-reading his literary birth. This first chapter includes a general background of both Peter Pan and James Barrie and a psychological analysis of Peter's mind, behavior, trauma, past as well as his sexual identity and personality. I will use Piaget as my theoretical perspective for the analysis of the trauma of Peter's past, his mental growth, his relationships with others and the idea of identity as a whole. Moreover, a Freudian analysis will be applied to him in order to illuminate the troubles of his personal and sexual relationships, his sexuality and his physical and sexual development.

My second and third chapters focus on the American movies. The second one explores the two Disney films; that is, the evolution of the ideology Walt Disney aimed to reflect in *Peter Pan* and how popular culture has revisited the classic for decades. It provides a thorough analysis of four female characters: Tiger Lily, Tinker Bell, Wendy and Jane. All of them are radically contrasting types of women while three of them have been exalted as feminist symbols. I include an interpretation of Disney's intentions using Wasko as my scholar of reference, a close-reading of the main themes and plot of the films, and an in-depth overview of the female characters. My project continues with a third part in which I go through *Neverland* and supply an interpretation of its main characters focusing on their sexuality and conception of gender and sex. This was the most challenging part of my research since I had to immerse myself into Gender Studies, more concretely LGBT and Queer studies, whose discourses are not straightforward and easy to understand from the start. Finally, in my conclusions I gather the

main results of my research which reaffirm the original aims of my final project and include other unexpected findings.

1. Introducing the Main Characters of J. M. Barrie's *Peter and*

Wendy

When we come across sentences like “faith, trust and pixie dust”, “second star to the right and straight on ‘til morning” or “to die will be an awfully big adventure” we associate them to the mysterious figure of Peter Pan and all the movies in which he stars. Not many people, nevertheless, are familiar with the original texts in which he first appeared, all written by James Barrie. The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed Barrie’s talent for creating children’s literature, in particular novels and plays that focus on Peter Pan: *The Little White Bird* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904), *Peter Pan in Kensington’s Gardens* (1906), and *Peter and Wendy* (1911) among others. There are, as well, very few studies whose focus is Barrie’s legacy, which is more shocking if we bear in mind how present Peter Pan is in our culture. For all of the above, the first part of my project takes the novel *Peter and Wendy* and analyzes the Peter Pan we find on its pages. Firstly, I briefly comment upon the author and the context of the novel. Secondly, I analyze Peter Pan’s psyche and mental growth having Piaget as my scholar of reference. Finally, I examine Peter Pan’s sexuality and apply a Freudian reading to it.

A lot of Peter Pan can be found in his creator, J.M. Barrie. The Scottish novelist, playwright and journalist lived a life full of mystery and inner struggles. The origin of his strivings comes from the trauma of losing his brother David when he was only fourteen and the posterior mental disorders that bloomed in his mother after the event (Ramos 15). As a consequence, his mother ignored him since her mind was set on the memory of her dead son. On the other hand, he lacked the support of a father since Mr. Barrie was always physically and emotionally absent. His initial rage against his progenitors evolved into a profound wish to reach his mother’s heart. He was

unsuccessful; his trauma made his future unconsummated marriage be a failure (Ramos 52-53). He was unable to love his wife, in whom he only looked for a mother. He then found happiness in his own literary works and in the Llewellyn-Davies children—all of them boys—, with whom he shared a life-long friendship and who inspired some characters of his novels and plays. Their friendship was misinterpreted by some as something dubious (Ramos 39); still, I do not give credit to those speculations since his pathologies most likely made him unable to hold any sexual attraction towards children or anybody else—he felt like a child himself and there is no evidence of any sexual intercourse throughout his life².

Actually, Barrie could have suffered the Peter Pan syndrome—this term was created by the fans of the book and describes the ways Peter behaves in Barrie's oeuvre; it has become common in everyday language. Even though prestigious psychology has not identified this issue as a real mental disorder, pop-psychology and culture consider it a genuine illness. Barrie suffered too much too early in his life and was unable to enjoy his childhood. He realized too soon how precious the gift of childhood was and refused to grow up. His body, indeed, barely developed; he somatized his trauma and only reached a meter and a half of height. His fear of adulthood does not imply that he did not realize that growing up and taking responsibilities was the only way to live a healthy life. However, he could not grow due to his illness. He created Peter Pan as an exaggerated form of himself although there can be found many similarities between Hook and Barrie as well. His intention was to both praise the power of childhood and prevent the readers from the risks of it, since the ultimate heroine of his oeuvre is

² The children always claimed Barrie had never tried to seduce them or their mother. Furthermore, it is well known he did not have any sexual relationships with his wife, which was the cause of their divorce.

Wendy³, who saves the Darling children from a frightening future in Neverland. They even experience some terror when they arrive at the enchanted island—the fact that it is an island makes it even more dangerous. Actually, Peter Pan’s syndrome is a common issue in our post-modern society; that is: immature, narcissist, selfish, quick-tempered, insecure individuals with low-self-esteem and frightened by loneliness have bloomed during the last decades (Thompson). Their unhealthy obsession with childhood does not allow them to direct their lives properly, as happens to Peter Pan; a famous case is the singer Michael Jackson.

To analyze Peter Pan thoroughly, I must start focusing on his name and physical description. His last name provides us with a hint of the source of inspiration for his personality. Pan is the Greek god of nature and the wild, which literally refers to the paradise-like Neverland but also to his state of mind, since he virtually lives in the wilderness. Pan is also connected to idea of sexuality—for instance, his father taught him how to masturbate and he shared his knowledge with the shepherds—, which seems adequate provided the importance of this complicated subject in the novel (Walker 765). Also, he has been linked to the devil, due to his sexual habits and similarity to the goatish image of Satan—since he is a faun. His devilish qualities anticipate what Barrie seemed to know about him: there is a monster in Peter, although he is beautiful. A pretty monster is even more dangerous than a hideous one. It is striking that the only feature we learn about his appearance is such an abstract concept, which is merely a subjective impression attributed by the other characters. He is praised for his youth, but

³ It has been said that Barrie invented this name, which is partially true. Firstly, there are documents that prove that there were a few girls (and even a boy) named Wendy in Britain in the nineteenth century. The name could derive from the Welsh “Gwendolyn”, which means “white, dazzling and holy”. The meaning perfectly fits Wendy’s role in the novel and would allow Barrie to make a political statement, given his Celtic roots. However, it is known that Wendy was inspired by a little girl who prematurely died, Margaret Henley. She would refer to Barrie as “my friendly” but would mispronounce it as “my fwendy”. When she died, Barrie decided to use “Wendy” to honor Margaret and to symbolize their undying friendship and her loving nature. Thanks to *Peter and Wendy* the name became popular (“History”).

his image is blurry like that of a ghost; this could be used as an argument for those who defend the thesis that Peter Pan is dead, which will be mentioned later on. Finally, the fact that his first name means “stone” reflects his unchanging nature since he is the boy who never grows up.

All this leads to the matter of age. In Barrie’s *The Little White Bird* we discover that Peter is seven days old and there are not any other direct references to his aspect. However, in other texts and illustrations the fact that he has grown is undeniable. In 1912, for instance, a statue of Peter Pan was built under the direction of Barrie himself. His desire was to use Michael Llewlyn Davies, who was six years old at the time, as a model. The fact that he was six is not a coincidence; Barrie could have chosen any of the Davies brothers—who were younger and older than Michael—but he selected Michael because he had just entered the Freudian latency stage—I shall return to this. Nonetheless, he has been depicted as a 12-14 year-old boy in many filmic versions. The actors Bobby Driscoll, Jeremy Sumpter and Robbie Kay were 13-18 years old when they were chosen for the role of Peter Pan. All this helps to understand Peter Pan’s fatal flaw; he is a prepubescent boy who is “fixed⁴”, in Freudian terms, at the latency stage (6 y.o.) and whose issues find its roots in his first years of life (0-2 y.o.), at the so called “oral stage” (Pinillos 622).

To continue investigating Peter Pan’s pathologies we must delve more into his fictional origins. *The Little White Bird* (1902) and its following edition, *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), introduce us to the world of Peter Pan. We learn that he has escaped from his house after overhearing his parents speaking about his future as an adult. The subsequent fear he experiences pushes him to Kensington Gardens. There he

⁴ When the sexual satisfaction of a phase is frustrated by any element it creates a trauma that does not allow the child to move on properly to the subsequent phase and, therefore, provokes a “fixation”.

interacts with fantastic creatures such as fairies⁵ who eventually grant him a wish. Logically, he yearns for a way to return to his mother's arms. When he does so, surprisingly, his mother does not need him anymore since she has had another baby. He returns to the gardens and meets a girl named Mainie—which the readers may identify with the word “maniac”—, who becomes his fiancée. However, she breaks the engagement because her desire is to go home with her mother. Peter Pan finds then amusement in burying other “lost” boys in the gardens—see below. As we will see, this background will be essential to connect all of the symptoms and create a map of Peter's mind (Ramos 49).

Piaget's four-stage scheme of the development of the human mind can guide us in a better comprehension of Peter Pan's intelligence and logic. A healthy young child would reach the fourth stage by his fifteenth birthday. However, Peter Pan is trapped in the second one which, unsurprisingly, corresponds to the period between the second and the seventh year of life. This is the preoperational thinking stage in which the child is egocentric and cannot empathize with or care for anyone else's point of view. During this stage there is an intuitive phase too, in which the boy or girl hyper-generalizes and perceives reality in wide general classes (Pinillos 623). Children are, during this period, egocentric and narrow-minded little dictators who have a distorted image of reality and are unable to conceive that they are wrong or that those who surround him may have a different point of view. This coincides with the definition I provided above of Peter Pan and that we can appreciate in the following paragraph from *Peter and Wendy*:

The difference between him [Peter] and the other boys at such a time was that they knew it was make-believe, while to him make-believe and true were exactly the same thing. This sometimes troubled them, as when they had to

⁵ These evil creatures actually experience uneasiness during their first encounter with Peter Pan. This contributes to the theory that Peter Pan is either dead or the devil.

make-believe that they had had their dinners. If they broke down in their make-believe he rapped them on the knuckles. (Barrie 59)

Peter's abusive and dictatorial nature is reflected in his attitude with the other characters, specially the lost boys as the fragment above demonstrates. Therefore, we should examine the reasons of such a great stop in Peter's development following Piaget's theories. His incapacity to reach the higher stages of intellectual maturity makes him unable to form his identity. Adolescents must have experienced every single stage of Piaget's theory but they must also have a conscience of the continuity of the self. Furthermore, they must create their own values and goals to achieve in life; they must have a sense of wholeness and be valued and respected by others (Adams et al 173). All of this must be achieved in a comforting and supportive context. Peter was rejected by his family at a very young age; as a consequence, he forces others to respect him through fear—as the paragraph above implies. Besides, his morality is dubious due to his egocentricity and selfishness and, since he is stuck in Neverland and is unable to grow up, what goals can he pursue?

Family seems the immediate cause of Peter's demons. An inappropriate family environment can create four types of psychopathologies. Diffusion, for instance, is suffered by Peter. This is a consequence of family rejection, a low-caring mother and the withdrawn behavior of the father—who does not defend Peter when his spouse refuses to accept him when he returns from the forest; in comparison to Barrie's family, Mr. Barrie was never at home. This ambivalent relationship with his parents provoked mixed feelings of hate and the need of approval in both Peter and Barrie himself which developed into an identity crisis. This implies a rejection of any value Peter's parents could have taught him, even the positive ones which would have helped him to build an identity. Therefore, the one value that he learns from the days with his parents, which is

that he should become a responsible adult, is rejected to the point that he refuses to grow up (Adams et al 174-178).

Moreover, we learn that an identity is formed by a balanced combination of individuality and connectedness, and that the family system provides the bases of identity formation, a refuge for the child when s/he explores the world. Peter's individuality is useless since he did not have a "security net" that made him feel safe (Adams et al 177-178). When this complex dialectical process between sociability and individuality suffers distortions, there can emerge psychopathologies, which belong to two general categories depending on what the key of the problem is —relationships or individualism. Peter's mental disorders come from "anaclitic" developmental issues which create "infantile personalities", "hysteria", and concerns about how to give and receive love or how to become close with other people (Blatt 223). Peter was not taught how to love; therefore he cannot love and is afraid of becoming close to anyone. That is why he is the leader of the lost boys, not his friend, and why he carefully sets limits to his relationship with Wendy. As I mentioned, he was rejected by his girlfriend, Mainie, and his mother. His defenses are denial and repression and no critical analysis of reality (223). Hence, the concept of the self is neglected in order to focus on these convoluted relationships as well as to struggle with them (223).

In *Peter and Wendy* we find a clear allusion to this identity loss: Peter's shadow. In the Anglo-German tradition the shadow is the symbol of the soul. Shadows do symbolize the duality of life as well, especially during childhood. Darkness exists because there is light and vice versa. Without darkness we would be unable to appreciate light. "Light" and "darkness" can be substituted by "happiness" and "sadness", since life is full of bittersweet moments. However, Peter pushes what is supposedly harmful away from him; thus, he loses his shadow. Also, bearing in mind

the already mentioned Anglo-German tradition having no soul equals having no life, no identity. Accordingly, his lack of shadow alludes to his lack of identity. The intended heroine of Peter Pan's novels, Wendy, is the one who sews the shadow at his feet, which is not a coincidence. Leaving aside his obvious chauvinism —sewing is supposed to be a woman's duty; consequently, Wendy must do it— Wendy connects Peter to the real world and, in the end, that is why Peter throws her out of his world. Even so, Peter gives Wendy a chance at some point and, as a consequence, he gives himself a chance. Furthermore, he visits her in London, leaving Neverland; this has a deeper connotation. When Peter leaves his world of fantasy he does grow up a little. His visits to Wendy's house do not only expose his neediness for a mother or his love for fairytales. It proves that, deep down, he would like to grow up. That is the reason why his age is so blurry: when he leaves Neverland his body changes a little but his mind does not. Nevertheless, his psychological trauma stops him from joining Wendy in her escape from Neverland (Ramos 48-58).

On the other hand, the loss of the shadow could be compared to the loss of memory. Our memories are about our past and are linked to our family. His traumatic first years of life made him desire to block the images of an unhappy childhood. Our past is what creates the cornerstone of our identities and Peter, by rejecting it, portrays the different signs of dehumanization that are shown in this project. Unsurprisingly, he fears light as well, which is opposite to what children are afraid of. Light is a symbol of love and truth. He escapes from both and chooses to live in a fantasy. In spite of that, this has consequences: his reality is so narrowed that he holds onto fantasies to feel some emotions. However, deep down he feels empty and that is the reason why for him dying would be an “awfully big adventure” (Barrie 82). Nonetheless, he cannot die

because he has not lived. Dying is the culmination of human knowledge and growth, and he is just inadequate for this task⁶.

All of this intrigued the public, which meditated about the real nature of Peter Pan. The critics and the audience do not seem to agree whether Peter Pan is dead, an adult suffering the Peter Pan syndrome, a demon without a soul or something even worse. I believe he is a boy, who is lost in a limbo, who does not have a healthy identity, or a healthy sexuality, and whose mental disorders may make him behave in unusual ways. In the end, he is like a tragic Greek hero—even though the heroine is Wendy—with a fatal flaw he cannot overcome.

These mental disorders find their origin in cognitive barriers as well. Adolescents must learn to process certain formal operations and structures in order to be suitable to attain “personal, occupational, sexual, and ideological commitments” and build their own personalities and social traits (Adams et al 179). Minds are not mature until they reach hypothetical reasoning, which is absolutely necessary to conceive a genuine identity. A resolution of the identity crisis is “dependent upon attainment of formal logical thought and of questioning of conventional morality” (179), and Peter is unable of doing so. This theory is exemplified in Barrie’s novel since the lost boys do not dare to question Peter because they fear him, and Peter himself is absolutely narrow-minded. Nevertheless, Wendy is the heroine for questioning what has been established and, as a consequence, becoming an adult. Her “kiss”, which will be explored later on the project along with the validity of her heroine status, demonstrates this argument⁷.

⁶ Another sign that even during adulthood we keep learning and evolving is the fact that the Darlings, Wendy’s parents, do not find the idea of literally losing a shadow unrealistic or impossible. There is still some fantasy in their lives, which is positive. This proves that growth is a process that is completed with death.

⁷ The fact the Barrie saved Wendy indicates that, despite his complicated relationship with his mother and women in general, he did respected and even loved women. Women for him were saviors, which is why there are no lost girls in Neverland, even though a woman was the origin of his trauma.

Peter constructs an “ego-identity” (179) marked by his egocentrism which drives him to make random, impulsive and not well-thought decisions. Additionally, his egocentrism opposes to a perspective-taking attitude that would allow him to have a more accurate socially-oriented mentality. His lack of healthy social interactions has also produced in him an “abandonment depression” (188). This illness is associated with the rejection of society and the protection of individualism, combined with a hidden fear of being alone. He needs the lost boys, which is why he does not allow them to think about their mothers or question his ideas; furthermore, he refuses to be left completely alone again, as happened with his own mother or his fiancée. He buried the lost boys in Kensington Gardens so that they could not find a way to return to their mothers; consequently, the boys would feel as abandoned and dead inside as Peter himself. He first buried the lost boys, but then he started kidnapping them so they could praise him in Neverland and aggravate his narcissism.

Mastering the sex-drive is another problematic barrier for Peter Pan. Not only sex, but sexuality in general —our sexual development, trauma related to our sexual experiences and so on— has a great impact on our identities; perhaps the greatest impact is the one known as “Freudian pansexualism”⁸ (Wollheim 136). Freud was among the pioneers in identifying a sexual life in childhood since most previous psychologists only found a sexual drive in adolescence. For Freud there is a sexual object and a sexual aim⁹ in every form of sexual behavior. He redefines what was conceived as “normal” by pointing out there are deviations from the norm called

⁸ It must be added here that Freud never accepted the concept of “pansexualism”, which defends that everything is a consequence of a sexual drive, and which seems a parody of Freudian thinking. Freud does, indeed, connect many of our instincts to our sexuality but he does not limit the nature of everything to sex (Adams et al 137).

⁹ Freud claims that there are many forms of sexuality and sexual desire. Previously, society and science only visualized or morally accepted a female-male sexual intercourse which implied a connection between their genitals, but nothing else. This brought up the question of whether people live sex as society has taught them or as they would really like (Adams et al 138-139).

“inversions” in the first case and “perversions” in the second case (138). Having this in mind, we can argue that the sexual object for Peter is his mother or, as an extension, any mother-like figure, such as Wendy.

Firstly, we should bear in mind the five phases of sexual development that Freud enumerated and which range from the moment of birth to the puberty. Despite having a fourteen-year-old body, which would correspond to the genital phase, Peter seems stuck in the six-seven-year-old phase: latency, when the sexual drive is muted (Pinillos 622). On the other hand, since Peter’s greatest trauma appears when he is only a few days old, due to his parents’ lack of care for him, we can assume that he is fixed at the first phase: the oral phase. Every phase refers to the most erotic part of the body during certain years, in this case the mouth, which connects the baby with the mother.

At this stage, one cannot choose the sexual object and focuses on autoerotism. Pleasure comes from the mastering of the essential somatic necessities, which are satisfied by the mother; that is, the mother is both a sexual and a loving object (Wollheim 149). Peter should have found his own sexual object and seek other sexual experiences, but he is unable to do that due to his fixation. To remain safe of his painful thoughts towards his mother and the sexual discoveries that the future may bring, Peter finds a shelter in the mute latency stage. The only sexual activity he allows himself is narcissism, a step between autoerotism and the election of the object. His love for himself is his armor but, anyhow, he is dissatisfied. He cannot stay in the oral phase and is unable to select an object because in order to choose another person one must define her/his own identity, values and preferences (150).

In addition, we must rethink why Peter is fixed at the oral phase. Obviously, the answer is his unloving mother which provoked a non-resolved positive Oedipus

complex¹⁰. A boy loves his mother and hates his father because he regards him as a competitor. However, the complicated feelings towards the mother and the fear of disappointing the father together with the idea of castration¹¹ make children tremble and stop their sexual impulses, which initiates the latency phase. During adolescence, Freud continues, boys become closer to their fathers and keep a distance from their mothers, although they choose a sexual object similar to them; the Oedipus complex is then overcome (Wollheim 153-154). The rejection of Peter's mother caused his unviability to deal with this complex, and, therefore, he is unable to move from the latency stage or even the oral stage.

When he does seem to choose a sexual object, the mother-like Wendy, he is unable to love her; similarly, Barrie was not capable of satisfying his wife. Also, Wendy is not like his mother, but Peter makes her an actual mother. He desires a mother deep down and Wendy could act as one since she possesses the precious "kiss"¹², a symbol of a fully-developed sexuality; both Mrs. Darling and Wendy have it. When Wendy first acknowledges it she is anxious due to its implications; she must grow up and she does not feel ready. Moreover, the kiss reminds us of the oral phase at which Peter is fixed, since both imply a mouth. Peter, after he realizes what it is, is afraid of it and even Tinkerbell protects Peter from the kiss since kissing is the first step of a sexual relationship and that can only be achieved from adolescence onwards, which is why neither Tinkerbell nor Peter desire to grow up. It is ironic that the kiss appears by the mouth and not at the mouth or on the lips. It feels like Cain's mark: it shows the world

¹⁰ With this complex Freud discovered that bisexuality was a common feature of both boys and girls at a young age. During adulthood bisexuality does not disappear, but there is a tendency to choose one sex over the other.

¹¹ According to Freud, at this age boys realize that girls do not have the same genitals and believe their "sex" could be cut away from them. This proves that boys and girls at a young age do not distinguish between sex and gender. Boys' obscure thoughts towards their father and mother make them feel so guilty that they fear they will be punished as the girls.

¹² In a literal way, the kiss is an invisible mark that appears next to a woman's mouth when they reach sexual maturity. It symbolizes their personal and sexual growth.

they are mature enough to get married and have children. For me, this is a chauvinistic feature since it denotes that women should always be passive. Even when they are the owners of the kiss they cannot give it freely: it is possessed by the man who marries them—as the book clearly states: “[Mr. Darling] nipped in [Mrs. Darling’s house] first, and so he got her [and the right for her kiss¹³]” (Barrie 5). Women are sexual objects who cannot choose their own sexual object; they can only be chosen. The “cruelty instinct” (Wollheim 146) of male nature makes men crave to be the active member of the couple at every level.

Two more characteristics of the Oedipus complex must be highlighted. Firstly, it usually creates a conflict between brothers, who fight for the love of their mother (Wollheim 155-156). The so-called Cain complex lies within the very nature of a monotheistic religion in which brothers compete for the attention of an authority. Barrie’s mother loved David, his brother, to the point her health was deeply damaged after his death, which made her ignore Barrie. Peter Pan was also substituted by a brother, as if his mother did not need him. That is another reason why the lost boys are not Peter’s friends, they are his competitors. Ironically, at the same time, he wants to become a father for them, because he does not want them to be as lost as him, and because he knows what having an absent father implies; moreover, he searches for a mother for them—and himself—as well. Yet, he sets some barriers: Wendy must obey him and become a childish mother in a way; consequently, she must repress her kiss.

It would be unfair to end this chapter without making any further references to the end—which is hopeless for Peter—of Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*. Peter has lost Wendy and his “father”, Hook—whose parental role will be discussed in chapter

¹³ We learn that Mr. Darling gave up his right to obtain the kiss because of Mrs. Darling’s overcoming will. She, unlike her daughter, is truly a role model for women and subtly shows Barrie’s hidden respect and fear for powerful women, especially his mother.

three—, in a short period of time. Peter is left alone behind the Darlings' window where he sees a sort of happiness he cannot reach: a loving and caring family which would grant him a sense of wholeness and a full developed identity and sexuality.

The trauma that he develops due to his lacks appears in very subtle ways in Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. Peter Pan, a prepubescent boy fixed at the latency stage whose problems are rooted at the oral stage, is unable to grow up due to his immature preoperational mind and his unresolved Oedipus complex. He has built an ego-identity and enjoys narcissism as his sexual option in order to quieten his sorrow concerning personality and sexuality issues. In the end, the question whether he is dead or not does not matter at all: the truth is that he is in a scarier place, a limbo which he cannot escape. He is a ghost stuck in the middle of many processes: life and death, childhood and adulthood, sexual muteness and sexual maturity, and so on.

2. Socio-cultural Aspects in Walt Disney's *Peter Pan* and *Return to Neverland*: the Case of Female Characters

Walt Disney, as Peter Pan, never grows old. The almost hundred-year-old company, easily recognizable by Mickey Mouse's characteristic ears, collects success after success without a sign of weakness. The company's production goes from box-office hits to stuffed animals with the form of a grumpy duck, or the sunglasses with Elsa from *Frozen*. Such a huge empire has, undeniably, provoked a great impact on our culture and social media in general. Some recognizable and loved characters were born in the Hollywood studios, even if their actual origin lies in the pages of some old fairy tale. This is the case of *Peter Pan* (1953), Walt Disney's version of Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. Disney's impact on the Western civilization has made Peter Pan immortal both in Neverland and our minds. Tens of films, videogames or books drink from Barrie's novel thanks to the popularity of Disney's classic. Apart from being respectful to the source text, Disney's interpretation is very interesting for several reasons that will be examined in this section. I will, firstly, introduce the reader to the world of Walt Disney and his initial purpose when he, with the help of his workmates, created the movie. Secondly, I will analyze the most important issues of the mentioned *Peter Pan* and its sequel *Return to Neverland* (2002).

Walter Elias Disney¹⁴ (1901-1966) is a figure known by all. His works are praised by critics and audience, and he has been compared to artistic geniuses like Michelangelo and Picasso (Wasko 119). He has been granted honors by many of the top universities in the world, like Harvard or Yale (119). However, he is also in a delicate situation due to the constant controversy that surrounds him. The producer, director,

¹⁴ In order to make my writing clear, I will refer to the man as "Walt Disney" and to the company as "Disney".

designer and animator has been questioned due to his lack artistic integrity and his tendency to put down his coworkers in order to receive most of the credit. Many have claimed that he was not very talented or creative in artistic means, but rather a clever leader who kept his mind awaken when speaking about business (120-121). The Disney animation company witnessed a fine reception during the 30s and 40s, which would be followed by a loss of interest and the decrease of the artistic value of animation. The 60s was a time of change for Disney, since its popularity raised; since then, the recognition of its creative value has been increasing until our days (119-121).

Peter Pan (1953), Disney's interpretation of *Peter and Wendy*, was premiered during that decade of darkness. Nevertheless, it has collected a fine critical acclaim for its deep interpretation of the classic, and for settling a stylistic pattern which would mark Disney forever. The response of the general public, in spite of this, is surprising. Many viewers do not comprehend how a movie for children could be so dark and its main hero such an evil role model. It is true that Disney, especially its classics, creates films for both adults and children, which inspire multiple readings and even psychoanalytical approaches (Wasko 189). Walt Disney in particular is well known for his development of individual characters, to whom he often gave traits of his own personality, especially signs of his obsessive eccentricity (137). The 40s and the 50s stand out for the psychoanalytical dimension of Disney movies, which are said to draw on Freud's theories; hence *Pinocchio* (1940) and *Peter Pan* have been studied as using anal images, for instance (138). Such complex subjects can be read at two levels: they may be seen with the innocent eyes of a child but they also provide a challenge to adults with their possible hidden interpretations. Meanwhile, other Disney box-office hits lack this double dimension and have value only as ways of entertaining children.

The “Disneyfication of fairy tales” (Wasko 125) has encountered harsh criticism from experts in folklore, education and literature. Disney has censored stories, as well as used plots and twisted characters for purposes that differ greatly from the original sources (125). In fact, Walt Disney himself was denounced for this; he is also thought to have been too cold-hearted and willing to do anything for business. Related to this, Walt Disney’s marketing strategies and audience studies are well known in Western culture. Some find Disney’s works vulgar, excessively American and pretentious, since they attempt to moralize with their sex-free and nonviolent tales (126); others are less exigent and only see in Disney’s legacy a step further in the evolution of fairy tales, although they do not deny that Walt Disney’s apparent obsession with this genre was due to his own life struggles (127). In any case, Disney’s films have set a precedent in terms of artistic design and marketing techniques. Furthermore, Disney has marked the Western culture, and to some extent others as well, even if we are not aware of it. In *Peter Pan*’s case, rumor has it that Walt Disney reached an agreement with the American government to adapt Barrie’s novel in order to change the minds of a seemingly childish and immature generation of young adults.

Walt Disney’s supposedly hidden intentions could be analyzed in slightly different ways. Regarding the path that the Western world was building for future generations in the late 40s and early 50s, *Peter Pan*’s main message could be aimed at young adults, so that they followed Wendy in her decision to escape from Neverland — a state of mental wilderness which offers its first fruits during childhood and reaches its peak during adolescence. Hence, Peter’s devilish looks and manners would be carefully developed to show how devious and dangerous refusing to grow up is because, as Hook, one cannot belong in society unless s/he accepts the norms and conditions of adulthood. The end of the Disney classic may be said to reinforce this interpretation since

Neverland does not leave any proof of its existence. Even so, other messages can be read from the animated film.

As we are all aware of, the finest strategy to prove someone wrong is to experience in first person the faults of our beliefs. George Orwell's dystopic novel *1984* mentions, for instance, how the population was contented by their negligible acts of rebellion such as acquiring pornography. Actually, in Orwell's masterpiece pornography was secretly created and distributed by the government. Small acts of rebellion kept population satisfied since they felt they were not completely submissive. The same process is experienced by Wendy: a tiny dose of rebellion proved her wrong. Walt Disney would have made Peter a mysterious character that would light the flame of uprising in the hearts of teenagers around the world. Eventually, they would decide by themselves to grow up and would believe it was their own decision. This is far more effective than a tempting assertive prohibition from their parents, which could arouse a wave of melancholy and unhealthy dependence on the past after several years.

The 50s was in fact a time when the bad-boy figure became popular thanks to praised actors like James Dean or Marlon Brandon (Halberstam 5). Their mild acts of insurrection are virtually useless since most rebel figures then conformed to society or died, as proves the plot of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), which was premiered only three years after *Peter Pan*. Therefore, the message of *Peter Pan* was specifically appropriate for that era and convenient for both the ruling classes and the political forces. In fact, the origin of the term "teenager" goes back to the late 30s or early 40s of the past century and has become more and more popular. At the time, Post-war America felt powerful due to its economic bloom and international respect. The American dream and American way of life never looked brighter and American citizens believed in a present and future without social or economic insecurity. Therefore, it is possible to

believe that those who were still traumatized by World War II feared another Wall Street Crash of 1929 if the country were to be led by pleasure-seeking and careless teenagers.

Despite of this, pop culture has romanticized the mischievous half-human half-devil eternal boy. Indeed, Walt Disney's original intentions have not been accomplished. Wendy, the truthful heroine of the story, turned to be unappealing: she is a Snow-White-like old-fashioned house-wife-to-be; she is not a thrilling or exciting woman as Tinker Bell or Tiger Lily, or a humorous companion as the lost boys or Smee, or as mysterious and intriguing as Hook or Peter¹⁵. Peter, specially, has been transformed into a desirable concept in the minds of posterior generations, who would look back with melancholy at their childhoods and identify with Peter—even though a non-deceptive comprehension of the movie would make them think twice. Tinker Bell, with her blatantly sexy looks, has even become the second symbol of the Disney Empire.

In order to get to the bottom of these interpretations, next I will analyze *Peter Pan* (1953) in detail. The movie starts in a house in a middle-class district of London, during the early twentieth century. The Darlings, who have three children, get ready to go to a business party which provokes much anxiety in Mr. Darling. Michael, George and Wendy enjoy their childhood while faking pirate duels, telling stories or refusing to go to bed. Their childish pranks drive their dog/babysitter, Nana¹⁶, crazy even though she is so efficient at her job that she ultimately manages to control them. Yet, Mr. Darling's patience is limited and, as a consequence of a game and his self-consciousness, he punishes her and leaves her out, alone in the cold, for a whole night.

¹⁵ Smee is Hook's loyal second on board and Tiger Lily is the beautiful Native-American princess.

¹⁶ The name "Nana" alludes to the virgin mother of Attis; another sign of her mother nature (Walker 717).

Furthermore, he claims that Wendy's childish attitude does not correspond to her age any longer, so she must leave the nursery and settle in an individual room.

Wendy feels completely unsettled by this revelation because she understands she must grow up and rejects that idea. Also, she feels profoundly attached to her brothers; as an old Arab proverb says: "a husband can be found, a son can be born, but a brother cannot be replaced" (Walker 121). A real quirk of nature would lead the three siblings to a world where they would discover that growing up is inevitable as well as positive. Peter Pan arrives at the nursery in search of his lost shadow, which Wendy has kept in purpose —Nana tried to return it to his owner but failed¹⁷. Wendy eventually helps Peter sew it and, in return, he offers to take her and her brothers to Neverland, where she could tell the lost boys fairy tales and be a mother for them. Barrie is aware of the power of story-telling to keep people calm as well as to join communities. Parallely, a mother or female presence has been thought to unite groups or tribes in ancient communities (681). During Peter and Wendy's first conversations we can observe his sexism: he feels superior in every way and mocks girls. We, too, witness two sexual events that Peter does not respond to/return: Wendy's desire to kiss him —which proves her maturity and reminds us that Peter has not overcome Freud's oral stage (see chapter one) — and Tinker Bell's jealousy. The act of connecting women with sexuality states that they are more mature than Peter, but transforms them into something corporal and distant —related to the concept of "the other" —, which is discriminatory.

Afterwards, the five of them fly to Neverland. In order to go they need faith, trust and pixie dust, three dangerous elements that would make them obey Peter's wishes — as a drug dealer would achieve through drugs. There we meet Hook and the

¹⁷ Classic tradition believes that dogs are sensitive to the underworld and the dead, which would explain why she attempted to give Peter his shadow before it was too late (Walker 240).

pirates, and adult version of Peter and the lost boys¹⁸. Their constant rivalry is virtually meaningless. They fight their own inner trauma and externalize it with kicks and insults. The lost boys hate and love those father figures and at the same time desire and fear becoming like them. The pirates, on the other hand, envy the lost boys' youth and find in each of them a son-figure. All of these are different representations and paths that Peter could have followed. Nevertheless, the battle exists only within Peter's brain because Neverland is only a state of mind. That is why he, out of those characters, is the only one who can travel to the real world. Pirates and lost boys are like superheroes and villains; they need each other to find a reason for their own existence. This endless war should have come to an end in the final scenes of the movie: Peter should have killed Hook because Hook secretly desires so, which could represent a twisted homosexual inclination. Peter only murders him because he has to decide between Hook and Wendy, his father and mother figures, and the love for his mother weighs more.

In Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, Peter cries during a whole night after Hook's death without any apparent reason. The Disney Company considered this ending inappropriate for children and due to their own secret intentions. Hook is such a comic relief and loved character in the animated movie that killing him would have saddened the children. Also, Hook confers the story a cyclic dimension —see below. Unlike the original novel, the Darling siblings return home without their parents' awareness they had ever left. The lost boys stay in Neverland instead of fleeing the frightening island, and hence there is no material proof of their adventure. It seems it all happened in their minds; nonetheless, Mr. Darling recognizes the shine of the star that guides children every day to that pseudo-Wonderland. This implies that every adult has been in Neverland; it is a common step in the child's development, but it must be brief and soon

¹⁸ Pirates and lost boys seem Doppelgängers of each other. Doppelgängers are known to reflect each other's souls and follow each other through life (Walker 252).

forgotten. Disney's film does not contemplate the possibility of Mrs. Darling letting Wendy go back every year for the spring cleaning. Although this may seem sexist, it is actually a classic reference to the myth of Persephone¹⁹. The children instead realize that their father is good-hearted after all, which is what matters.

Furthermore, the children's adventures are interesting thanks to other events. Neverland's appearance coincides with the script Barrie elaborated for a possible movie version of the play. Disney believed that Barrie's novel was perfect for the unlimited resources of animated films (Tatar 333). Neverland reminds us of the land of Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*, where human nature faces horrors every day. The lost boys' violent behavior is not only aimed at the pirates or Native-Americans, but also at members of their own group. For instance, when Tinker Bell announces that Wendy is a bird²⁰ they do not hesitate to murder it without a further explanation; this means their sense of reality is distorted. Moreover, a great amount of criticism as a consequence of the film's depiction of the Native-Americans has been raised. The Native-Americans are the children's rivals; even though, as they explain, their battles always end up in forgiveness and bring along fun —everything is cyclical at this island. Besides, the Native-Americans are mere caricatures, grotesque figures which paradoxically sing racist songs about their culture. Even Tiger Lily, who is certainly beautiful, is stigmatized, as I shall discuss later. Walt Disney was well known for his white-supremacist ideology and received strong complains about using racism in his movies.

¹⁹ Barrie plays with the myth of Persephone, who has been kidnapped by Hades in the Underworld and is only let to visit the world of the living once a year during spring thanks to her mother Demeter. Wendy does the opposite: she is the one who escapes from her kidnapper, Peter, but decides to go back every year —with her mother's permission— to take care of him. Hence, Wendy is in a position of power, which is rather progressive.

²⁰ Indo-European beliefs hold that birds are reincarnations of one's soul. Wendy certainly has a soul because she is alive, while the inhabitants of the fantastic island are in a limbo-like stage. They haunt the bird because they fear and envy Wendy's humanity (Walker 101).

Additionally, the Disney's presentation of characters is the most interesting contribution to Barrie's legacy. From the beginning of the movie Peter Pan's nature is introduced by Mrs. Darling as a "spirit of youth" (2:38). His appearance differs from what we expect from a leading character in a children's movie. His pointy ears and reddish hair refer to Irish folklore, showing Peter's fantastic nature and proving that there is a devil inside of him. Red hair has been, actually, associated with the devil and its various forms like witches or even biblical figures like Judas. Red and gold are colors commonly used during both film and novel; they connect Peter to Neverland and symbolize mystery and beauty (Tatar 188). Even his green clothing has cultural implications since it is connected with sexual promiscuity and prohibited rituals (Walker 355). He might not be promiscuous in a literal way but his sexuality is certainly out of the norm. Disney wanted to highlight the green color —perhaps out of conservatism or as a way to highlight those implications— even though in Barrie's novel and numerous plays Peter never wears actual clothes, but leaves and flowers.

Peter is mysterious and fascinating; therefore, the obsession of pop culture with him is not surprising. We should notice, nonetheless, that he is selfish, physically and mentally immature, and troubled by the different pathologies I described in the first chapter; although the sexual dimension has been muted in this version, Peter still is a sexist, a racist, and a narcissist dictator. However, the audience pities him and even empathizes with his imperfection —unlike with the non-charismatic and "perfect" Wendy. Furthermore, he is a hedonist and does not care for others, not even Tinker Bell — it is uncertain whether he empathizes with anyone, which could even make him a psychopath. His only heroic moment can be found in Tiger Lily's rescue, which he only leads to feed his own self-love. His very name makes reference to Pan, as we have seen in the previous section, a God associated with masturbation, which is an expression of

self-centeredness to some extent (Walker 765). His narcissism makes Peter surround himself with the lost boys, who admire and obey him, and female creatures like fairies, mermaids, Wendy and Tiger Lily, who feel a sexual magnetism towards him. He does not return their love or attraction, not because this is a Disney movie but because his lack of identity and sexual desire ban him from doing so.

In addition, his obsession with his mother, which has evolved into a severe unresolved Oedipus complex, has further sexist connotations. It brings into our minds other female figures which have been stigmatized for their, supposedly, evil qualities. Some examples are: Eve, the duality “Mary [Magdalene] the Harlot”/“Mary the mother” (Walker 496), Yonijas, the myth of *vagina dentata*, as so on. Peter would have one more reason for his fixation with mothers. According to some psychoanalysts, pseudoincestuous feelings towards mothers bring about something as pure as rebirth (430). When sons overcome their Oedipus complex they are reborn and grow into healthy adults. Since Peter cannot be reborn he is virtually dead, as an incubus who sucks the life out of others (431).

His nemesis, Captain James Hook —whose name cleverly coincides with Barrie’s first name, James— suffers from an identity crisis as well. His looks reveal he belongs to the Victorian era, where he could not fit due to own illnesses —his case will be commented in chapter three. In this film Hook’s mental illnesses are depicted almost exactly as in *Peter and Wendy*; nevertheless, he has not assimilated his trauma nor finds peace in death, as happens in the novel and other filmic versions. It is worth mentioning that Disney refused to make him black, as first editions of the novel portray him. In popular culture, the black race has been connected, in an absolutely racist way, to Cain —whose treason would make God mark him forever with a black skin— or the devil.

This would have been far too polemical and inappropriate in a Disney's movie taking into account Hook's corrupted character.

Moreover, other secondary characters have some depth as well. Mr. Darling's physical appearance, to begin with, matches the caricature-like Mr. Darling from Barrie's novel. However, he is nicer and more good-hearted than in the original *Peter and Wendy*, as we can appreciate at the end of the film and in certain scenes—as when he takes Nana out of the house. Mrs. Darling is a specially plain character, a trait shared with her daughter. Both of them are delicate, feminine and wear prudent outfits. They represent the classic idea of beauty with their delicate noses, fair hair, tiny wrists, controlled manners and a desire to perform all the activities that are usually connected with womanhood; that is: sewing, cleaning, looking after children, staying at home, being obedient and so on. Both Wendy and her mother are praised by Barrie and Disney, who desired to make them role models for future generations of women, which shows their sexism. Even so, their lack of empathy has made them forgettable and far less complex than in Barrie's oeuvre. Inevitably, the attempt to make Wendy the ultimate heroine was unaccomplished and her dull personality has only contributed to the exaltation of Peter Pan. Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily differ from this view of womanhood as will be mentioned later on.

Return to Neverland's (2002) tone differs from its original literary source. It harmonizes with the idea that pop culture holds about Peter Pan and Neverland. Peter is presented as being nice and caring; Tinker Bell is less sexualized and Hook becomes a caricature of himself. *Return to Neverland* does not have a high artistic value, as most critics have pointed out, but it is quite enlightening when analyzing Disney's evolution. The very title of the movie should help as a hint to interpret it; it can be both a noun and an imperative form: *return* to Neverland. In a nihilist and practical world that is too

contaminated by technology and modernity, the loss of faith is too unbearable. Disney chooses a practical, faithless and adult-like protagonist, who will eventually discover the power and importance of fantasy and imagination. We could criticize that Disney is not coherent with the ideology of its films since in some growing up is encouraged while in others the significance of childhood is applauded. This could be seen as a business strategy: Disney gives the audience the vision they have formed about Peter Pan, which differs from the one provided in the 1952-movie. Moreover, it could be a genuine desire to protect the little fantasy left in a society where younger generations are forced to grow up too quickly.

The plot mimics the original *Peter Pan* to some extent. Wendy's daughter is captured by the pirates at the perfect time: when she had lost all faith and almost her childhood. World War II has changed the lives of millions of Europeans, including children, who contemplate the world from a nihilistic point of view. Wendy and her husband are presented as competent and loving parents for Jane²¹ and her little brother but the war has separated them; Jane's father has joined the troops and the two siblings will be eventually evacuated and separated from their mother. Jane does not believe in Peter Pan, not even when she is captured by Hook and his pirates, who believe she is Wendy, and when Jane is rescued by Peter. Her lack of faith in fairies makes Tinker Bell seriously ill and only Jane's trust will save her. The lost boys determine to make her believe again while Jane does everything to return to her duties at home –duties that have nothing to do with sewing or being passive but with protecting her family in active ways. This will lead to a final battle with Hook which will finish like the one in *Peter Pan*: the lost boys win and Jane is able to go back to London where a reunited family

²¹ It is well known that "Jane" is a generic name for "girl" or "everywoman" (when a woman has no name we refer to her as "Jane Doe"). Therefore, every woman should empathize with her. Moreover, a long list of powerful women are called Jane: Jane Eyre, Jeanne D'Arc, Jane Austen and so on.

and the end of the war greet her. She, as expected, has learnt that faith has an important place in adulthood.

This movie changes the role of women in the Peter Pan's universe, as posterior movies featuring Tinker Bell and her fairy friends would do, and provides a softer image of the boy who would not grow up. He is more caring, nicer, and more respectful; even his facial features are gentler. The sexual tension and psychological background are lost; Jane's family does not present any real problem and Peter Pan, the lost boys and the pirates –not the Native-Americans this time- live in harmony. This makes the movie a relative failure in the Disney universe because it is not truthful to the original novel or even the previous Disney movie, and barely contributes to the enrichment of the world of Peter Pan. Only Jane's personality has a slight interest.

The film's plot is lightly based on the seventeenth chapter of Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, which was meant to be performed in theatres only once. The chapter narrates how the Darling women are meant to follow Peter to Neverland, generation after generation. Peter longs for mother-like little girls; adults are banned from his land and he barely notices the physical change in them. For him, Jane is just another mother figure (Tatar 192-193). Peter's rejection of powerful mothers leads us to the ancient matrilineal inheritance tradition in which societies were controlled by women and their motherhood choices (Walker 419). According to several of these traditions, men would fear such biological power and limit women's sexuality, making them feel ashamed by their condition and oppressing them. As if to confirm these traditions, many stereotypes—like the notions of femininity and masculinity— have been created in male-centered societies in order to establish a comfortable status quo for men.

Both femininity and masculinity are explored through the heterogeneous characters depicted in all Peter-Pan-related films, in a direct or indirect way. Masculinity could be described as the series of traits, conducts or, in general, expressions of the self that are linked to males as a consequence of social, political and cultural boundaries (Halberstam 1). Having said that, the use of the term “masculinity” should not be limited to the description of male bodies, intellects and behaviors (1). In fact, in *Peter Pan* and *Return to Neverland* we come across three female characters whose characteristics exude masculinity in various ways.

Firstly, the clearest case is Jane from *Return to Neverland*. Wendy’s daughter was conceived as a fitter role model than her old-fashioned mother. She protects her mother and brother when her father is called to serve in the Infantry during World War II. She rejects Wendy’s sensitivity and love for fairytales as something useless, and has become a practical and skeptical pseudo-adult. At the beginning of the movie she is presented with a pink and girly dress and a teddy-bear. After her father’s farewell, she breaks into the screen with a military helmet, boots and a beige gabardine which, along with her shaved nape and short hair, offers an image of a tomboy like that of Scout Finch in Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960).

Tomboys are girls who act as boys, according to society’s stereotypes, usually driven by the desire of freedom and mobility that boys can enjoy (Halberstam 6). It is most likely that the trauma of war and the early responsibility she feels make her desire to be adequate for the situation. The separation from her father in special and the future parting from her mother make her be the bitter girl we witness most of the film. Nevertheless, her character certainly improves the vision that *Peter Pan* proffered about women, as she could be identified as a prototype of a feminist icon, which results more positive than Wendy’s influence for both boys and girls.

Jane's courageous and feminist actions in the movie include: an expedition through an endangered London in order to obtain clothing for her brother, a rejection of activities which have been associated with womanhood in a sexist way such as sewing, her unwillingness to be a mother for the lost boys, her lack of sexual interest in Peter, her attempts to leave Neverland by her own means, her independence and her strong mind, which avoid most temptations of the enchanted island. Jane is inquisitive and curious, traits that Barrie highly encouraged in young children unlike previous authors²² (Tatar 188). However, since the film is very light and certainly aimed at children, tomboyism is not further developed in order to keep the movie simple; in fact, tomboyism in society is not approached as a problem until a girl reaches puberty, which is not the case of the nine-year-old Jane (Halberstam 6). Despite this, it is a shame that such positive qualities are connected to masculinity and, therefore, are exclusive for males in general. A conceptual change must start with a linguistic change — i.e. the meaning of tomboyism— since no idea can trespass a metaphysical state until it is materialized in the shape of a word.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned traits carried powerfully negative connotations when applied to women when *Peter Pan* arrived at the movie theatres back in 1952. Barrie himself presented Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily in such way that they would be criticized. On the one hand, Tinker Bell is unequivocally sexualized due to her Marilyn-Monroe-like figure, her red lips —also associated with the devil— and her revealing clothing. Throughout the past decades she has been softened and adapted for child audiences but in her first appearance in a motion picture —which is also the first time Tinker Bell is provided with a real body, rather than being just a light— her looks

²² Even though Barrie's oeuvre provides a controversial view about women — since women were the reason of his trauma— he was not a misogynist completely; he did love and respect women, but depicted them following old-fashioned stereotypes.

had malicious interpretations. Firstly, she was portrayed as a kind of woman that is sexually desirable but should be avoided for her indecency. Secondly, she was meant to attract a masculine adult audience who would enjoy her playfulness. Furthermore, her personality's development is both pleasant and deceiving.

On the one hand, Tinker Bell is truthful to the essence of classic fairies, which were the complex and evil offspring of the devil. They would charm young boys with their beauty and offer them unthinkable pleasures that would drive them mad. For now, this corresponds to Tinker Bell, which is supposed to corrupt Peter and the lost boys while living in a not-so-trustworthy paradise. Disney's interpretation of fairy tales has been disapproved of, even in a later version of Tinker Bell, but it is quite profound and genuine in this case. On the other hand, Disney has used the low moral values of fairies to attack women who did not fit in Wendy's standard, yet another example of sexism. The same occurs with mermaids, who are well known for their wicked desire to seduce men so that they reject other women and die. This can be appreciated in the movie when the mermaids flirt with Peter to keep him and Neverland but wish to drown Wendy. Films like *The Little Mermaid* (1989) copy the physical appearance of those sirens but turn them into warm-hearted beings. In *Peter Pan* mermaids are a tool to criticize sexually active, provocative or independent women. The same happened with Tinker Bell: the movie indirectly states that women who behave like them must reconsider their attitude and follow other role models like the one *Peter Pan* proposes; Wendy.

Society usually considers the masculinity of non-white or low-class people in a detrimental way (Halberstam 2) and Tiger Lily²³ is the proof. At first Tiger Lily seems beautiful, proud and brave. However, such traits only were originally meant to sexualize

²³ Tiger Lily's name combines the fierceness of the tigers and the pure nature of the lilies, which are linked to virginity. Hence, Wendy, Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily could represent the three aspects of the Virgin Mary: virginity, motherhood and ancient knowledge (Walker 603-612).

her and exemplify her lack of intelligence, in opposition to the submissive and passive Wendy, the prototype of the perfect woman. In Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* she appears as a cold princess who rejects men and literally breaks their hearts. She is called a black Diana, which implies that she has the good qualities associated with the Greek goddess but in perverted ways. While Diana is admired for her virginity and fighting qualities, Tiger Lily is despised for being brave and proud, since these are not traditionally feminine qualities. Her courage is yet another masculine sign of how she should not act, as when she fights in battle or dances seductively by the fire. Thankfully, pop culture has found those characteristics appealing and attractive in both women and men, and has risen her as a feminist icon: a desirable ethnic princess who enjoys her sexuality – she is a virgin because she has chosen to be so, which does not mean that she cannot enjoy a satisfactory sexual life —while she can be in a position of power without a man. She is not objectified in the texts and movies and her only fault is her love for Peter, which she cannot resist due to Peter's magic and devilish qualities. Peter seduces them but offers nothing in return. While women, like Daisy Fay, have been criticized and insulted for displaying that behavior, men seem to get away with it quite often.

Walt Disney's legacy has shaped the hearts and minds of Western culture, sometimes in dangerous ways that we are not able to identify. Disney's portrayal of women was originally detrimental, which is highly harmful for this already discriminated minority due to the dangerous influence of cinema. *Peter Pan* and other related works are not only an interpretation of Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. We must be aware of how media transforms and presents familiar works to us in order to fully comprehend the implications that artistic creations have in our lives.

3. Approaching Damion Dietz's *Neverland* from LGTB and Queer Studies

This chapter will provide a different, fresh and radical interpretation of J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. Almost a century after its first publication the world of Peter Pan has been explored in numerous artistic ways. I have already examined Disney's legacy, which corresponds to the general and more accepted view of Peter Pan. In spite of the tens of works dedicated to the boy who would-never-grow-up, very few creations grasp the very essence of Barrie's Neverland and its inhabitants. One of them is Damion Dietz's indie film *Neverland* (2003). This film corroborates that there is no need to include actual pirates or mermaids to accurately express the atmosphere and meaning of Barrie's original texts²⁴; therefore, it deserves a whole chapter in my final project. I will start with an introduction to the film and its director, followed by an analysis of the film's most striking elements; afterwards I will comment upon the field of study selected —LGBTQ²⁵ Studies— to analyze the main themes of the movie: sexuality, sex and gender identity; finally, I will delve into three characters —Tiger Lily, Peter Pan and Hook. In all, my attention is to provide a better understanding of the movie in particular and how complex and important for everyone is to live in harmony with our sexuality, sex and gender identity.

Damion Dietz is only one director among the numerous group of artists who have dedicated their lives to capture the experiences, emotions, thoughts and struggles of a community which is united by their alienation from the “dominant sexuality and sex/gender norms” (Clarke et al 5): the LGBTQ community. After graduating from the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, Dietz became a

²⁴ In this movie, Dietz follows Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* but also alludes to his play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904).

²⁵ The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and queer community.

writer, actor and director of underground and independent films. His movies have granted him certain recognition in cult cinema for instance thanks to *Fag Hag* (1998). The movie that concerns us, *Neverland*, received various awards like the Q Award at Fort Worth Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival; Dietz was also granted an Honorable Mention at the Dances with Films Festival. He surely chose Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* as an inspiration for *Neverland* due to the complexity of the sexual and social relationships and psychological processes that the book portrays. His interpretation of the novel not only proves that a low budget and limited mediums can shape significant creations; it also demands us to pay closer attention to independent intellectuals whose oeuvre provides an understanding of life that distances from the politically correct cinema that Hollywood usually offers. In this case, he finely adapts a dawn-of-the-century novel to our days and presents a truly unexpurgated interpretation of Barrie's masterpiece. In the end, despite not being a masterpiece in technical means, *Neverland* is able to move its audience and prove that low-budget films can be thought-provoking and have a lot to offer.

The movie begins at the Darlings' impressive mansion in the USA of the 1990s. They are an upper-class couple who has adopted three ethnic teenagers. The movie criticizes the irresponsibility of uncaring parents who adopt children but who actually do not pay attention to them. They adopt them because it is fashionable—even more if they are from a different ethnic background—, not due to parental vocation. Mr. Darling is far too worried about his social status and Mrs. Darling finds some relief in her alcoholism. They are the living proof of the consequences of the corrupted modern world and perhaps carry some sort of trauma from their childhoods—since the movie infers that the roots of the problems of unhealthy adults lie in in their first years of life. Furthermore, they are childish adults, unlike their daughter Wendy. She is a responsible

teenager who will soon move to college, even though her parents would like to keep her at home to organize the everyday affairs. She presents a different kind of beauty, not like Barrie's or Disney's original Wendy: she is black and curvy, wears boyish and practical clothing and barely any makeup, while her hair is completely braided according to the black custom. She differs from the original Wendy in that she has already grown up. She is an intelligent and mature woman who will become the real and truthful heroine of the story —a pretension that Walt Disney and Barrie were unable to fulfill. However, the center of attention is not really placed on her since Dietz is more interested in character development than in moral lessons. From the beginning we are aware that she is distressed by her parents' attitude as well as her two other brothers: Michael and George. She feels unhappy with the way her life has turned out to be and expresses it in sentences like "There is no reward in being the level-headed one" (8:00).

The moment her parents leave the door an androgynous figure enters her house in search of his keys: Peter Pan. We are told that Tinker Bell, Peter's friend and a fairy dust dealer, threw his car keys²⁶ in the Darlings' garden during a tantrum. When Peter meets Wendy, he tells her about Neverland: an amusement park where he and the other lost boys live. He, like his friends, is a runaway who has been rejected by his family and escaped from the idea of a hopeless future by doing drugs and living in a world of fantasy. Wendy and her brothers decide to join him, despite Tinker Bell's jealousy, to hide from their bitter reality. From this conversation we also learn that "all fairies are dead" (14:00) which is a metaphor of the lack of tolerance when it comes to people who are different like Tinker Bell. Furthermore, the fairy shows her love for Peter; yet, he

²⁶ His car is named "my shadow" as a wink to Peter's lost shadow at the beginning of *Peter and Wendy*. Furthermore, the keys are a phallic symbol. It is significant that both Wendy and Tinker Bell manipulate the keys; it could represent their sexual interest in Peter.

rejects her, which only helps to accentuate her Borderline Personality Disorder—a very clever interpretation of fairies’ moral bipolarity according to many tales.

Peter comes across as an objectively sweeter and more likeable character than in other versions of the story, which does not imply that his serious disorders will not be an unshakable barrier. He leads the Darling children into Neverland in a visually thrilling trip set with imaginative songs, dazzling lights, a hypnotizing eternal night and a cinematography that reminds us of Baz Luhrmann’s oeuvre. They arrive at the amusement park, a location that coincides with the dreamy nature of Barrie’s Neverland: children would love to stay there forever, but one can only stay for a while until it is too late—in a metaphorical and physical sense. There we meet Hook, a prone to fantasizing janitor, with his second-on-board Smee. Hook’s main goal in life is to haunt and punish the lost boys, the group of young fugitives who have taken roots at his place of work, with the excuse of moral rectitude. This group of youngsters disguise themselves as adults. In fact, they wear costumes, like in the Disney version, to make their identification harder but also, unlike in *Peter Pan*, to express their individuality through their clothing, as most teenagers do.

We tread on the heels of these boys who then enjoy a Native-American show. Compared with the Disney classic—full of racism, inappropriate songs and caricature-like characters—, Dietz’s movie portrays beautiful Native-Americans, led by Tiger Lily, who defend their cultural identity with a moving song and message. They still suffer some sort of discrimination for what society, with its prejudices, has forced them to do: a strip-tease show—see below.

Throughout their experiences in Neverland we find Peter’s dreams materialized in the symbol of a carousel: that is, he wishes to enjoy an eternal ride in the attraction

of youth but at the same time he is afraid to fall and lose himself in the process. We witness how everybody discusses their overcome or not trauma: for instance, Tiger Lily speaks about how she dealt with sexual harassment. Peter becomes angrier as the movie advances because Wendy is tearing his world apart and we learn that Hook is a homosexual who enjoys kidnapping and sexually forcing children. Wendy and her brothers finally come to the conclusion that nobody's life is perfect but, at least, their lives are safe and stable. They decide to leave Neverland and save all the lost boys, who have resolved to follow Wendy's example and escape Neverland, except Peter. Wendy has offered them her emotional and economic support. Nonetheless, Peter, Tinker Bell and Hook's trauma is so profound that they do not make it. Hook is killed by Peter without any sign of defense since the former had kidnapped the lost boys to oblige them to fulfill his sexual needs, and Tinker Bell eventually dies from a drug overdose, which will be analyzed later. Peter's fate is the most frightening; Wendy opens the doors of her house for him but a future marked by marriage, a job and an education seem unsuitable to him. His identity crisis and poor self-development stand as an iron wall between his and Wendy's world and, what is more, he is left completely alone.

Such an original and visually rich proposal requires a complex and modern reading for which LGBTQ psychology can help. This psychology branch focuses on the "lives and experiences" (Clarke et al 3) of those who belong to the LBGTQ group. It was conceived after realizing that the target and focus of general psychology was the heterosexual and non-trans population, and after the certainty that homosexuality was not a mental illness (3). It all began with "gay affirmative" (13) psychology—an old-fashioned term that has been substituted for "lesbian and gay psychology" (5)—which challenged the theory that gay men and lesbians were the same as heterosexuals. Many scholars explored this theory and eventually fought against the notion of heterosexual

normality and the tags and categories that have been normalized (17). If we pay attention to this last point, we will discover that sexology²⁷ has redefined tags such as “gay” or “lesbian” which excluded a large number of ways of living sexuality. In this same line, Alfred Kinsey (1894-1956) developed a scale in order to measure sexual preference²⁸ (11). Thinkers as Juliet Mitchell, Jacques Lacan or Judith Butler among others have redefined related concepts, vindicated heterodoxy, and provided with hope and freedom those who have been marginalized (10).

Judith Butler in particular is one of the leaders of the Queer Studies movement, which took up from the Lesbian and Gay Studies field but differs from it in the sense that queers rebel against heteronormativity. They do not desire to be labelled as “normal” according to the standards of a narrow-minded society. They celebrate how queer²⁹ they are and reject the already mentioned identity categories, which are hierarchical and oppressing, as the basis of their resistance. They desire to fight against that harassing power in opposition to those who wish to be accepted as “normal” within the system. Their struggle and passion should grant them our respect and make movies such as *Neverland* gain value.

In *Neverland* we are presented adolescents rather than children, so the sexual dimension of Barrie’s plays and novels can be more easily and clearly explored; furthermore, we are able to witness the evolution of their mental and sexual identity and their consequences in a modern society as well. Identity development and sexuality are highly connected as the keys of a healthy future in adulthood. Adolescence is the most

²⁷ Sexology is the “systematic study of sexuality and gender identity” (Clarke et al 6).

²⁸ The Kinsey scale goes from grade 0- exclusively heterosexual behavior- to grade 6-exclusively homosexual behavior passing through different levels like grade 2-primarily heterosexual, but more than incidental homosexual behavior. In fact, sexual preferences usually change through a lifetime (Clarke et al 11).

²⁹ The term “queer” was an insult aimed at the LGBTQ community which implied “strangeness or peculiarity”. Many members of the group rejected the term; on the contrary, Queer Studies celebrate it (Clarke et al 41).

important stage of such development since the traumas of childhood arise and teenagers may decide to reveal how they feel about sex and gender. Tiger Lily, Peter Pan, Hook and Michael are the most interesting figures in this respect and none of them, except Hook perhaps, feels ashamed of their sexual and gender identity at first sight. Even so, it cannot be concluded that all of them have reached the final stage of their own identity and sexual development, which is called: the identity synthesis³⁰ or full psychological adjustment. For a better comprehension every case will be discussed individually.

In order to understand Tiger Lily's case we should revise certain concepts such as gender and sex. The idea that gender can be imitated or copied contradicts the modern notion of gender and sex. Sex is thought to be biological while gender is supposed to be set by a series of social and cultural premises (Humm 106). The gender roles that are associated with the female or male nature have led to diverse and even harmful phenomena, like gendering, gender gaps or gender stratification (107-108). The idea that a sex is linked to a specific gender implies that, for instance, a male with a feminine behavior or clothing, according to the usual norm, is merely copying the other gender and rejecting his "proper gender" (Butler 722). However, Butler argues, "gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" (722). Therefore, people perform³¹ a gender; they do not "have" nor "are" a gender (Clarke et al 41). The reasoning that Butler provides is highly complex but, to sum up, it concludes that since an origin cannot be proved we should assume that this sex-gender association belongs to a social and cultural dimension and, as a consequence, it should be constantly redefined.

³⁰ Identity synthesis refers to the moment when the sexual identity is fully assimilated as another trait of one's identity; nevertheless, it does not have a special weight in one's life (Clarke et al 154-157).

³¹ The idea of the performativity of gender was developed by Butler. Butler holds that, although gender is not simply voluntary, we should bear in mind that the notion of gender is not conscious. What happens is that we perceive it through the eyes of cultural tradition and everything we do is shaped by it (Clarke et al 41).

On the one hand, there are people who do not identify with one gender or the other or with masculinity or femininity and may adopt a transgender identity³² (Clarke et al 88). On the other hand, some may reassert themselves as masculine or feminine, including trans and queer people³³, and may embrace a normative gender identity. The trans and queer groups were originally left aside by the now called LGBTQ field of studies; for this reason, queer theorists have criticized such oblivion in their writings (88-89).

Having this in mind, we should take a look at Tiger Lily, *Neverland's* Native-American drag queen/transsexual—it does not come across clearly; maybe Dietz desired to include both groups in the representation. He—or she, as he has adopted a feminine identity—is one of the most mature and level-headed characters of the movie, which invites the audience to reconsider the old-fashioned misconceptions they may hold about transsexuals and transvestites. Tiger Lily may have been conceived as a corrupted character in Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* and Walt Disney's *Peter Pan*; nonetheless, as has been argued in the previous chapter, their original intentions were unsuccessful and she raised as one of the strongest characters of the saga, even as a feminist icon. Therefore, Dietz's decision to make her a transsexual gives an even more radical twist to the Native-American princess: he proves that anybody can be, and should be, a feminist and that we should revise our conception, or misconception, of gender. Moreover, it is a call for society and even the possibly remaining conservative sector of the LGBTQ society to accept and respect trans and queers.

Additionally, Tiger Lily's case is even more special due to her ethnic condition. It has been proved that in the USA, the location of the film, non-white trans people

³² Those people who adopt a transgender identity do not identify as just male or female (Clarke et al 88).

³³ The trans and queer groups includes drag queens and kings, transvestites, transsexuals, androgynous people and so on.

directly suffer a discrimination when it comes to income or promotion (Clarke et al 93). Some of them have even had to work as prostitutes in order to survive (93). Therefore, a sexually active behavior does not represent an innate trait among the trans community, but a barrier set by society that they have had to overcome. Perhaps Hook was conditioned by this misconception when he attempted to rape Tiger Lily, as we learn when she recounts the incident to the lost boys. On top of that, she is a Native-American; a community that carries the trauma of dispossession of the land which adds sorrow to the already conflictive situation of the LGBTQ community. Some of the consequences of this situation are alcoholism or violence. Queer Native-Americans' mental health is troubled by their ethnic condition, which complicates even more their identity development. Furthermore, they are usually rejected for their sexual condition by their communities; therefore, being part of the Native-American group deeply aggravates their already convoluted situation (93).

Regarding these issues we can reach a more in-depth understanding of Tiger Lily, which only helps us to admire her more. She remains calm and mentally healthy for the whole film despite Hook's attempt to force her sexually or her separation from the outside world. She, indeed, selected Neverland as a place to live with other members of her racial community who understand her, and who share a different gender and sexual identity from the norm. Her dancing crew has decided to live away from their communities and the world in general in order to be in peace with themselves. Tiger Lily seems to accept such condition. However, she criticizes the strict American society during her performance with a clever and ironic twist. After singing a love song as part of a stage performance she brings from the backstage a huge dream catcher—one of the most recognizable symbols of her culture—with the picture of the Statue of Liberty glued on its center while she sings: “Native Americans, Native Americans / put the red

in 'red, white and blue'. / Native Americans, Native Americans / owned the land before you" (31:22). Including a criticism in an apparently superficial show about love is so surprising and rebellious that it makes her performance even more powerful. In fact, Disney's *Peter Pan* was criticized for the racist song the Native Americans perform; in opposition, the value of Tiger Lily's song is even greater. She vindicates her ethnicity, despite of the fact that she, presumably, was rejected by her people, because she comprehends that it is a problem linked to the influence of American hypocrisy. She explains this in the song and in a speech she gives to the public after it with elegance and pride, the most recognizable qualities of the original Tiger Lily; the attributes that have helped the character leave behind the stigma that Barrie and Disney put on her. In her speech and song, she criticizes that Americans are proud of their American dream but oppress their own citizens when they do not fit in their hermetic standards. She even proves how strong she is by breaking more stereotypes. For instance: she sips some alcohol but she does not show the slightest sign of alcoholism; she is a survivor.

Furthermore, trans and queers are not only drag queens or transsexuals since androgynous people have also rejected the custom of putting a normalized tag to their sexual and gender identity. Peter Pan is the finest example. In Dietz's movie, Peter Pan is interpreted as an androgynous teenager. From Barrie's original texts I have reached the conclusion that Peter's childhood trauma has left him without a proper individual identity, which also implies that he does not have an ordinary sexual and gender identity. I have already mentioned that in *Peter and Wendy* and *Peter Pan* Peter enjoys flirting with Wendy, Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily. However, this is not a manifestation of his sexual desire, but a proof of his narcissism and even his need of a mother figure. Androgyny also appears in the novel when speaking about fairies who can be male,

female or none of these (Tatar 185), among other situations like when Peter cannot distinguish whether Jane is a boy or a girl (Barrie 191).

Dietz interprets all of the above and Peter's lack of sexual desire as a sign of his androgyny. Firstly, we can appreciate this through his physical characteristics: he has soft and rounded facial features, black nails, make up and glitter, and one pierced ear — which for me was a sign of his rejection to be tagged as simply male or female. For Carolyn G. Heilbrun, androgyny implies a “spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests [...] a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom” (10-11). In many religions and cultures around the world androgyny has been praised. Many legends speak of gods who combine the virtues of male and female minds, bodies and spirits which made them complete beings, like a combination of Adam and Eve, as is the case the Indo-European superior entity: the Primal Androgyne (Walker 32). Shiva, Shakti-Kali, Aphrodite or Adam have been called at some point androgynous (33). Angels are thought to be androgynous as well. The angel Horae is quite similar to Peter in the sense that he was confined to Fairyland, an earthly paradise like Neverland, from the celestial paradise —which would not seem a problem at first, but when we analyze it it turns to be quite tragic (36). Furthermore, ancient culture regarded transvestism as a characteristic of androgyny—Peter's clothes are quite common in that sense— and as a sign of castration in order to become closer to women —in this case, Peter's mother, who initiated his great trauma (142). Queer movements and ancient cultures consider the androgynous condition as superior, since only androgynous beings are capable of reaching *apolytrisis* —release— or *moksha* — liberation (34). I do not share this belief when speaking about Peter's case.

I am convinced that for Peter this androgynous state is another sign of his identity crisis which produces anxiety and a mental handicap that does not allow him to

lead a healthy existence. In *Neverland* Peter calls himself a pansexual³⁴ at the beginning of the movie. He does in fact respect everybody despite their sexual and gender identity, as pansexuals do; however, unlike them, he does not feel sexual desire. His incorrect use of the word symbolizes his desire of belonging to any group and his lack of knowledge regarding sexuality. His ego is so damaged that all his energies are centered on nurturing self-love in order to create a shield which allows him to survive. He enjoys boys' and girls' company and affection, but at a platonic level in order to fulfill his narcissistic drives.

Tinker Bell is the most satisfactory example. Her jealousy is not the only proof of her sexual craving, as is the case in *Peter and Wendy* and *Peter Pan*. In Dietz's movie she simply faces Peter and tells him about how she feels and does not let Wendy come too close to him. When Peter finally decides to leave her she loses all hope of obtaining his love and dies. In *Return to Neverland* we had already seen how fairies die when they are told that someone does not believe in them³⁵. In this case, Tinker Bell dies when Peter finally expresses that he does not love her back: her love for Peter is what keeps her alive. In fact, in the movie we are told that she dies from an overdose of fairy dust, understandably drugs. In a metaphorical sense she does die from an overdose of fairy dust because, as we learn in previous movies, fairy dust comes along with faith and trust; she had too much faith and hope in Peter, which made her final realization fatal.

Next I will introduce the complex character of Hook. Peter's father is absent, thus, he must find a father figure somewhere. Hook is the answer. Hook appears in

³⁴ Pansexual people feel emotional or sexual attraction for anybody, despite their gender or sex identity, a feeling which comprehends transgender, cisgender, intergender, and other people.

³⁵ In *Return to Neverland* it is very striking that Tinker Bell starts to die when she is *told it* directly. We assume that she was already aware that Jane does not believe in fairies but she keeps hope, as she does in *Neverland*, until the deathly words come out of someone's mouth.

Peter and Wendy as a grown Peter Pan, his alter ego. The ultimate villain of the story is no other than Peter himself, who is trapped in a hopeless future; while the villain for Hook is his own inner child, his childhood traumas, which do not allow him to move on with his life. Barrie's Hook can be seen as an adult with the Peter Pan syndrome, who is condemned to live in Neverland since he could not fit the expectations of the Victorian society in Great Britain. However, in Dietz's film, Hook is more developed than Peter in the sense that he seems to have defeated his Oedipus complex and found his own sexuality. In spite of this, he presents some "inversions" or "deviations" (Wollheim 140) from the norm.

From my point of view, Hook is clearly a homosexual and, perhaps, even sexually inclined towards children because in his heart he is a child himself. What cannot be denied is that Hook is tortured by his obscure future and the constant ticktack of the clock inside the crocodile. Peter fed the animal with the clock which follows Hook without stop. Therefore, both Peter Pan and the idea of ephemeral nature of human life haunt Hook constantly. Nonetheless, he finds a way out: he commits suicide in a metaphorical way. He lets Peter defeat him, which is figuratively a suicide, since they are the two sides of the same coin. For Peter, Hook is the father that he should have hated and loved during his Oedipus complex. In *Peter Pan* (2003) the actor Jason Isaacs plays both the role of Hook and Mr. Darling, proving Hook's parental nature and the struggle of loving and hating a father as happens with the Oedipus complex. The tradition of having a single actor for the two roles has been respected from the very first representation of the play and also reinforces Wendy's fascination for Hook. Wendy has some conflicts with her father—which are overcome by the end of *Peter Pan* and *Neverland*—and sees a father in Hook; thus her love-hate relationship with him. Such a peculiar casting demonstrates as well that all grown-ups are actually pirates.

However, this does not happen in Dietz's movie, perhaps because Hook's character is far more dubious in this version and implying that all adults resemble him would be an exaggeration. Thus, *Neverland* presents a more honest Hook: he is openly a homosexual and probably a pedophile. He does not hide his homosexuality but he does try to justify his desire for young boys. He, as the original Hook, is not suitable for the requirements of the modern world. He is a janitor, a job that is not in high esteem in the Western world³⁶. Most of people would not be troubled by this, but Hook is. He creates a fantasy where he pretends to be a figure of law, justice and decorum using sexual punishment and bondage to teach outcast children a lesson. He gives extreme importance to his job to compensate his weaknesses. He manages his troublesome sexual desire by creating a rivalry between him and Peter, the one he desires the most. Probably, deep down, he hopes for those young boys to obtain a brighter future and escape Neverland in a literal and metaphorical manner, because he wishes he could be able to do so. It is too late for him and Peter, that is why he focuses on Peter more, but the other lost boys still have a chance, as the end of the movie proves. On the other hand, he envies them and desires their youth and future full of possibilities; consequently, he undergoes angst and anger towards them. These contradictory feelings only contribute to create a more intricate personality.

Unlike what could be expected, Hook might be not disturbed by his homosexuality but by his apparent pedophilia. He created the fantasy mentioned above to justify it since he is aware of the moral complications it raises. His pedophilia could be analyzed by means of psychic identification. It has been propounded that identification and desire are not compatible. However, Butler holds that "wanting to

³⁶ Hook claims that he has studied in the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London (22:32). Barrie's Hook as well had attended a prestigious school, Eton, hence his good manners. Barrie even conceived him at first as an evil and well-mannered teacher (Tatar 155).

have someone” and “wanting to be someone” (726) are ideas that can coexist. She recognizes that identification comes from a response to a loss which is followed by a mimetic practice whose goal is to include that “lost love within the very ‘identity’ of the one who remains” (726). This loss is confined by incorporating the subject of such loss into one’s identity (727). This alien in one’s mind hinders the possibility of creating a serene self-identity. Therefore, this aspect of one’s nature becomes the most outstanding trait of one’s character and is present in a negative way at every moment of one’s life; moreover, it is not assimilated by us and as a consequence the construction of the identity cannot be completed. Hence, Butler’s theorizations help us to understand Hook’s personality better.

Hook’s obsession with children has evolved into sexual desire because he both longs for boys and wants to be a boy. In Disney’s first screenplay Hook faces the audience and proclaims “Children do not love me” with sorrow (Tatar 155) which already demonstrates Hook’s real nature. Peter cannot grow up, either cannot Hook; hence their obsession with each other. Their magnetism responds to the comprehension of their state: Hook was and is Peter and Peter is and will be Hook. Hook only feels alive when haunting and harassing the lost boys; but the best prize is Peter. He only does him a favor by killing him, because only a thorough psychiatric treatment would help him to develop his identity and find some peace, and he is certainly unwilling to do so and society could not care less.

It would be unfair to finish this chapter without another reflection on Hook’s sexual life. At the beginning of Dietz’s movie we encounter another case of pedophilia and out-of-the-norm sexual practices. Michael, the youngest of the Darling siblings, has a stable sexual relationship with his middle-aged nanny. She disguises herself as a French maid when they meet to have sex. Everybody knows about it, even Michael’s

parents but only Wendy and George seem a little upset about it. Not even the audience pays attention to this event, which is, at first, taken as a meaningless anecdote within the movie. However, Hook's pedophilia happens to be a big deal. Certainly it is more extreme, but both sexual practices are conflictive and illegal since Michael Darling is an underage teenager.

Michael surely finds older women attractive due to his mother's lack of affection: he seeks love in mother figures as his nanny, who has taken care of him when his mother has not. Besides a clear criticism to uncaring parents, Dietz points out how our society regards heterosexual "perversions" (Moon 746) with a lighter reproving. For instance, sadomasochism is perceived as something natural, in the sense that it has been domesticated, in locations like the military, prisons, athlete groups or even schools. Pop culture views demonstrations of such practices as even romantic as the success of Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) or E.L. Jame's *50 Shades of Grey* (2011) show. After all, homosexual practices are always branded as devilish and attached to homosexuality as being outside the norm. Dietz points out the hypocrisy of such beliefs even when we do not notice it: as when we do not pay attention to Michael and his nanny.

To conclude, Wendy's final words in Dietz's indie movie *Neverland* summarize Peter's deepest and darkest nature: "your laugh is infectious" (77:14). His youth, looks and way of life may be appealing, but, as happens with roses and their thorns, if you get too close you get hurt. Wendy has realized, as we should do, that Peter's lack of [mental, sex and gender] identity makes him unsuitable for the real world. Besides, the movie invites the audience to explore the minds and bodies of Barrie's characters from a different yet truthful perspective. Dietz's interpretation opens the door to LGBTQ studies, which inquire into the world of those who struggle to obtain respect and

recognition regarding some of the essential traits of human nature: sexuality and self-identity at every level.

Conclusion

My final project draws attention to several works related with the figure of Peter Pan, which include James Barrie's novel *Peter and Wendy* (1904), Walt Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Return to Neverland* (2002), and Damion Dietz's *Neverland* (2003). Part of my aims are to point out the relevance of psychological and sexual development during adolescence, the great trauma that a deficient treatment of those aspects may bring about, and the reconsideration of themes such as gender, childhood and womanhood. After an evaluation of several theories and a close-reading of the main sources I have come to the following conclusions.

Using Piaget and Freud as two of my scholars of reference I have found the hidden story in *Peter and Wendy* or Peter Pan's secret: he is a prepubescent boy fixed at Freud's latency state whose trauma initiates in the oral stage of a child's development. He displays the second stage of Piaget's analysis of childhood: the preoperational thinking phase in which children are narrow-minded dictators. His anaclitic developmental problems have created an infantile personality which makes him unable to relate to others. As a consequence, he has neglected the very concept of the self to block his distress which has developed into a lack of identity and mental disorders. He also needs to achieve a healthy sexuality and a defined sexual identity, since his lacks are a great cause of pain for him. Peter's unresolved Oedipus complex is the cornerstone of his troubles. Therefore, he has constructed an ego-identity and has based his sexual life and identity in narcissism in order to cope with his undeveloped identity. This last finding bewildered me and surpassed any of my expectations.

Secondly, I have delved into Walt Disney himself and have analyzed the psychoanalytical double dimension of his movies. In the case of *Peter Pan* he pretended

to show that adolescence, symbolized by a demonic Peter trapped in the horrors of Neverland, is an ephemeral stage from which Americans must escape by maturing so that America would not be led by hedonist infantile teenage-adults. Mass culture has taken his legacy and reversed his intentions: Peter Pan has become a symbol of the wonders of childhood, Wendy has been neglected as the heroine of the story and Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily have emerged as powerful female leaders whose appeal lies in their rich personalities, their braveness in a men's world and their explicit sexuality. Moreover, the contemporary Walt Disney Company has adopted the position of the general public, as works as *Return to Neverland* prove, with a paradise-like Neverland and a pure-hearted Peter Pan that welcome one of the most independent, spirited and determined female characters of the Disney universe: Jane. I have also demonstrated the importance of the symbolism buried in fantastic elements that are usually manipulated on purpose by the so-called Disneyfication of fairytales, whose intentions go from a desire to sweeten fairytales for children to a wish for promoting a certain ideology.

Finally, I have highlighted the little attention we pay to alternative art forms like indie movies and how they represent new and fresh ideas that can enrich our conception of the world. *Neverland* revisits the themes of the Barrie's classic and adapts them to our days so that we can empathize with them. Peter Pan is now an androgynous teen whose toxic behavior must be avoided; furthermore, Wendy is recovered as the heroine of the movie, as the original novel intended, but with great appeal and enviable qualities that make her a great role model. Other characters such as Hook or Tiger Lily show their hitherto hidden sexual identity and captivate us with their demons, which are no longer softened. The movie is raw and courageous and demands a place in our minds given its portrayal of the LGBT community and concepts like gender or sex so that we can rebuild old-fashioned stereotypes and create a truthful "land of freedom". *Neverland*

thus points a finger at the hypocrisy of America and society in general, which does not allow its “out of the norm” citizens to live, even though they might suffer mental disorders forever. The solution is not to be part of the norm but to destroy and reconstruct it in a Queer Studies manner so that we can all fit. For me, using a classic work of literature as the basis of my project, finding such an altruistic interpretation and proposing to use it for such an honorable cause has been a delightful and surprising journey.

Finally, my project has helped me to reconsider my own ideas and the concepts that were set in my mind; moreover, it has allowed me to discover new paths of investigation for even the most innocent-looking novels and the seemingly unimportant films. I now believe that that is what literature, cinema and arts in general are about: being able to reach and represent new realities and open the path of a healthy debate in which opinions and ideas are interchanged to enrich our vision of the world.

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