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“One girl is more use than twenty boys”:
An approach to female roles in James M. Barrie’s
Peter Pan

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Women's characterisation	5
Wendy Darling	10
Women and housework	13
Children growing up	15
The figure of the Mother	17
The figure of the Father	20
The story lives on	23
Conclusion	24
References	26

Introduction

*Peter Pan*¹ (1911) tells the story of Wendy Darling and her brothers, who are taken to Neverland by Peter Pan, the boy who never grows up. Thus Wendy escapes from her home to play the role of 'mother' to Peter's companions, the Lost Boys. In this land, the children live various adventures fighting the redskins, meeting the mermaids or defeating Captain Hook and his crew of evil pirates. Nevertheless, as they begin to forget their parents and their previous life in London, Wendy persuades them that the right thing to do is to come back home with their real mother, and eventually grow up.

James M. Barrie conceived the story of Peter at the close of the nineteenth century and published the novel of *Peter Pan* in the early twentieth century, years before World War I. At that time the roles of men and women were regulated by a belief in the intrinsic inequality that characterised both sexes. Such a belief established that men should be the rulers of the world and women the 'weaker sex' destined to serve their husbands and family. The ways in which this patriarchal creed is inscribed into the dominant literary genres of the period have already been extensively analysed by feminist criticism. Not so much attention has, however, been paid to those genres which have traditionally been labelled as 'minor'. Such is the case of children's literature. Some authors, nevertheless, have noticed the patriarchal bias to which this genre was also subjected. Judy Simons, for example, has pointed out that "eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century children's books are full of strong, active boy characters, and

¹ The first appearance of Peter Pan in children literature was in a novel Barrie published in 1902, *The Little White Bird*. It told Peter Pan's first seven days of life and his adventures in Kensington Gardens. Later on, in 1906, this novel would be re-published in two volumes under the title of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. However, by that time, Peter Pan was already famous among children and adult audiences. On 27th December 1904 a theatre play named *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* made its debut in the Duke of York's Theatre of London. Due to the success of the play, many asked Barrie to write a novel about the main character Peter Pan and his adventures in the new land of Neverland. Nevertheless, Barrie did not want to make a fixed definition of Peter and refused. But, years later, due to the proliferation of unofficial works about Peter Pan, Barrie ended up publishing in 1911 a children novel titled *Peter and Wendy*, which afterwards would become the novel we know as *Peter Pan*. Eventually, the original script of the play would be published with the same title in 1928.

much more submissive, domestic and introspective girls" (2010: 143). In the nineteenth century, and until the outbreak of World War I, the fictional worlds of boys and girls were being clearly delimited. Each one had its own internal laws and its own territory, from which the other sex was completely outlawed. Already in 1886, the literary critic Edward Salmon stated that "Boy's literature of a sound kind ought to help build up men" and "Girl's literature ought to help to build up women" (in Simmons 2010: 146). This is how things were at the time and how he thought they should be. Although *Peter Pan*, just as the original play, was aimed both for boys and girls, it grew up influenced by this atmosphere of separate and unequal roles.

The aim of this essay is, therefore, to study the ways in which the patriarchal doctrine of the time is reflected in the characterisation and treatment that Barrie gives his male and female characters, mainly through the character of Wendy Darling, as she is the co-protagonist of the book and the most relevant girl/woman. The place that women occupy in a world of separate spheres and in their own home will also be analysed, as well as the way in which, like Wendy, girls grow up into women/mothers by following the example of the preceding generations. In addition, the figure of the father will be taken into account as a counterpoint to the figure of the mother.

Women's characterisation

One common feature Barrie ascribes to women is rivalry. In *Peter Pan*, all the women fight among themselves to be the one who stands out from the rest, to be 'the chief' or to win the love of a man. This rivalry is shown from the very first page of the book, through Mrs Darling's description: "until Wendy came her mother was the chief one" (2010: 1). Thus, when Wendy is born, she comes, not to share the mother's first place in the home, but to throw her out of the spotlight, as if mother and daughter were competing to be the focus of attention at home. And, as when Wendy is born there are only three members in the Darling family, the attention they are competing for is that of the father. Mr Darling, a man, is the one who does not have to fight for his position because it is secured. So he acts as an arbitrator or judge in this fight of power and decides who wins and becomes the 'Queen of the House'. This position as a mediator, automatically puts him in an elevated position in relation to the two women.

In Neverland, just like in London, women keep on competing to be the only one in the eyes of a man. This is the case of Tinker Bell, the main representative of Neverland women, and whose only reason to hate Wendy is the fact that she has attracted Peter's attention upon her, so that Tink now has to share Peter's affection with an intruder. Thus, women in *Peter Pan* can be divided into the two groups traditionally pointed out by feminist criticism: either they incarnate the archetype of 'the innocent virgin', or that of 'the whore'. The one who belongs to one archetype fights against the ones belonging to the other archetype (ex. Wendy is a 'virgin' and has to fight Tinker Bell and the Mermaids, who are 'whores', in order to survive in Neverland). As Heather E. Shipley points out (2012), this rivalry makes it impossible for women to team up when the situation is unfavourable to them. For example, when the pirates attack Peter and the Darlings on their arrival in Neverland, they are separated into three smaller

groups: Peter on his own, John and Michael, and Wendy and Tinker Bell. Though they are lost and separated from the group, Tinker Bell, instead of helping Wendy, decides to fool her and persuades the Lost Boys to kill her. Tinker Bell's jealousy and hatred for Wendy are declared from their first encounter: "She says that you are a great ugly girl, and that she is my fairy" (2010: 34).

Besides, Tinker Bell lives with Peter and a bunch of boys under the same roof without being married to anyone. On top of that, the book also suggests that she belongs to the group of the 'whores' in exchanges such as the following:

'Then, what is it?'

'It isn't for a lady to tell.'

'Oh, very well,' Peter said, a little nettled. 'Perhaps Tinker Bell will tell me.'

'Oh yes, Tinker Bell will tell you,' Wendy retorted scornfully. 'She is an abandoned little creature' (2010: 123).

Along the book, Peter constantly undervalues Tinker Bell. Although she loves him, Peter is not aware of her feelings - he is not aware of anybody's feelings, actually - and interprets her commitment as the loyalty of a dog. Actually, he calls her as someone calls a dog when she is missing: "'Tinker Bell', he called [...] 'Tink, where are you?'" (2010: 27). For him, she is just "quite a common fairy" (2010: 34), while he is an extraordinary boy. Still, the loyal Tinker Bell is ready to drink Peter's poisoned medicine and die for her love: "and with one of her lightning movements Tink got between his lips and the draught, and drained it to the dregs" (2010: 152). Nevertheless, Peter does not feel the same about fairies, although he acknowledges he likes them on the whole: "they were rather a nuisance for him, getting in his way and so on, and indeed he sometimes had to give them a hiding" (2010: 32). Even though they were the ones who adopted Peter when he escaped home and looked after him, the narrator considers those little women childish enough to need the "hiding" of the man of the

house to correct their behaviour: "Fairies indeed are strange, and Peter, who understood them best, often cuffed them" (2010: 77).

But the first characterisation of a woman in the book is that of Mrs Darling:

She was a lovely lady, with a romantic mind and such a sweet mocking mouth. Her romantic mind was like the tiny boxes, one within the other that come from the puzzling East, however many you discover there is always one more; and her sweet mocking mouth had one kiss on it that Wendy could never get, though there it was, perfectly conspicuous in the right-hand corner (2010: 1).

Mrs Darling, like all the women in *Peter Pan*, is described in detail, but her intellectual capacities are not even mentioned. She is "lovely" and with "a romantic mind" that suggests a young, naïve and even childish attitude towards life. She also has a "sweet mocking mouth" as if she was not taking the real world seriously. Also in the description of Tinker Bell, the narrator draws attention upon her physical qualities and the way she is dressed, making no reference to her intellect at all:

It was a fairy, no longer than your hand, but still growing. It was a girl called Tinker Bell, exquisitely gowned in a skeleton leaf, cut low and square, through which her figure could be seen to the best advantage. She was slightly inclined to *embonpoint* (2010: 26).

The descriptions of women are basically objectifications. Mrs Darling is compared with a box full of boxes from the Far East, something enigmatic that hides an unattainable secret, and exotic like that far away land. She is described as an alien being, as an Other. However, what Mrs Darling keeps in her inner box -her mouth, in fact-, turns to be only "a kiss". Thus Mrs Darling's nature is reduced to a being who loves – or does not love – the rest of beings around her. In other words, a being who gives – or does not give – herself in body and soul to others.

The treatment of the Indian princess, Tiger Lily, is also interesting. She is presented as a beautiful warrior princess whom every man wants to marry. Nevertheless, though she is a fighter, her first appearance is as the pirates' prisoner and,

even though she is going to be murdered she does not even try to escape because: "she was the daughter of a chief, she must die as a chief's daughter, it is enough" (2010: 98). She is presented as a 'damsel in distress' who, even though brave enough to assault the pirates' ship, must not try to escape until Peter Pan saves her from a terrible death. In spite of being a warrior she still needs a man to rescue her. Thus, women's inferiority stands out and even is supported by the very women involved – as Tiger Lily herself refuses to fight back.

Another characteristic feature of all women in *Peter Pan* are extreme moods:

Tink was not all bad: or, rather, she was all bad just now, but, on the other hand, sometimes she was all good. Fairies have to be one thing or the other, because being so small they unfortunately have room for one feeling only at a time. They are, however, allowed to change, only it must be a complete change (2010: 57).

Thus, Tinker Bell is treated as a madwoman. And the mermaids seem to be as irrational and capricious as fairies are. Even Wendy, though she is older than her brothers, seems to be more impressionable, to the point that she not only likes Peter Pan but falls in love with him: "[...]and yet he [Peter] was here and there in John and Michael's minds, while Wendy's began to be scrawled all over with him" (2010: 8). Her emotions go to extremes, just like her mother's: "And gayest of all was Mrs Darling, who would pirouette so wildly that all you could see of her was the kiss" (2010: 6).

It is not her married life that makes her so gay: "the many gentlemen [...] discovered simultaneously that [they] loved her, and they all ran to her house to propose to her except Mr Darling, who took a cab and nipped in first, and so he got her. He got all of her, except the innermost box and the kiss" (2010: 2). Mr Darling only owns her physically and economically. Their marriage is compared to a robbery in which Mr Darling has deprived Mrs Darling of a marriage for love at the expense of a marriage for property – her property and herself as property. Mr Darling even gives up getting to

know his wife and is not interested at all in her true love: "He never knew about the [innermost] box, and in time he gave up trying for the kiss" (2010: 2). Nevertheless, in Barrie's eyes, he is not guilty of being selfish. Instead, it is his wife who is to blame for being too stubborn. Not even the best conqueror among men would be able to get to Mrs Darling heart: "Wendy thought Napoleon could have got it, but I can picture him trying, and then going off in a passion, slamming the door" (2010: 2).

On the other hand, although Mr Darling is the rightful owner of the house, it is Mrs Darling who is in charge of running it:

At first she kept the books perfectly, almost gleefully, as if it were a game, not so much as a brussels sprout was missing; but by an by whole cauliflowers dropped out, and instead of them there were pictures of babies without faces. She drew them when she should have been totting up. They were Mrs Darling's guesses (2010: 2).

In the England of the beginning of the 20th century, it was the wife's duty to take care of the house and the house's economy and finances, at the same time as she was a loving mother who looked after her children. Still, the narrator does not lose a chance to underestimate Mrs Darling, and with her, the female gender. Both Mr Darling at his work and Mrs Darling at home deal with numbers and use money for their own administration. Nevertheless, Mrs Darling's calculations are treated as if "it were a game", and one of minor rank. And, of course, her administration will fail at one point. Mrs Darling's sudden lack of interest in the administration of her house reminds of a child who starts a game eagerly and soon gets tired and abandons it in the middle for a new game. In this case, Mrs Darling's new "game" is having children. Although it was a normal wish for a woman like her at the time, the narrator cannot conceive that she's abandoning part of her duty for a 'silly whim'. Thus Mrs Darling is not able to fulfil her duty because she is a day-dreamer and, therefore, she is not a good wife and woman. She ruins the family's economy for her vagary of becoming a mother: "as they were

poor, owing to the amount of milk the children drank ..." (2010: 4). However, in patriarchal societies, it was expected of women to have children and become mothers, so the fact that Mrs Darling is told off for it, is a contradiction in which women are trapped. Her role as a mother will be discussed in depth later on.

Wendy Darling

Although Wendy Darling, the character that stands for London women, is the protagonist of the book together with Peter Pan – it must not be forgotten that in its first edition it was called *Peter Pan and Wendy* –, she is not described at all. She is the only female character who is described in terms of her thoughts, actions and desires rather than of her physical appearance. Despite her mistakes, attributed to her being a woman, she is well considered by the narrator; unlike other female characters.

Wendy's role is highly symbolic. For example, Holly Virginia Blackford presents the theory that Wendy's abduction can be interpreted by referring to the Greek myth of Persephone². Karen Coats, in her review of Blackford's book, says that it is a "recurrent pattern of female development at the level of plot and character" (2013: 1). According to this theory,

Young Persephones [...] reach out for transitional objects, which, like Persephone's narcissus open up new and potentially dangerous worlds to them. They enter these worlds and meet compelling figures, most of whom are very attractive boy-toys [...] but all of whom challenge the girls to question their mothers' values and restrictions (2013: 1).

Thus Wendy/Persephone is attracted to Neverland/Underworld by a Peter/Hades who tempts her with, of course, housework and maternity / narcissus. According to Blackford, the purpose of this journey is for girls to develop and transform themselves

² Goddess Demeter's daughter, Persephone, is kidnapped by Hades, who takes her to the Underworld to be his wife. Seeing that Persephone misses her mother and is unhappy, Hades, god of the dead, makes a deal with Persephone's mother, Demeter, goddess of agriculture. Thus Persephone will remain in the Underworld for half a year, and will return to her mother in spring to remain in the earth's surface for the other half. This was the Greek myth by which the seasons' change was explained in the Antiquity.

into fertile Demeters. And so, Wendy matures in Neverland and decides that her responsibility is to come back home and grow up to become a woman and a true mother. In addition, this theory is reinforced by the agreement between Mrs Darling and Peter by which Wendy will take turns between her mother and her 'husband'. It is not by chance that this shift takes place precisely in spring.

Peter could, in fact, be referred to as her 'husband' because, in fact, the exchange of the thimble and the corn button at the beginning of the book may be interpreted as the beginning of a symbolic marriage between Wendy and Peter. Just after this exchange, Peter takes Wendy, his new wife, to his home, Neverland, to be stepmother to the Lost Boys, who already were like his children for Peter.

Actually, Wendy and Peter's first encounter looks like a courtship: Wendy takes care of Peter but, when Peter does not pay attention to her, she pretends not to be interested in him and goes to sleep. Thus, playing a stubborn game of adults, Wendy gets Peter's attention back, and even gets him on his knees with his declaration: "Wendy, one girl is more use than twenty boys" (2010: 31). Hence, the narrator declares Wendy "a woman" for this victory won with pretensions, as if those were the weapons of a real woman: lies. "Now Wendy was every inch a woman" (2010: 31). Now Wendy is willing to give him "a kiss". Nevertheless, these images of the romantic young couple are soon broken by Peter as he does not know what "a kiss" is, thus reminding the reader that they are children and are not prepared for romantic love. Or at least, Peter is not, maybe symbolising the difference between boys and girls when it comes to maturing, showing that girls mature faster than boys. Wendy, as Maria Tatar notices, is symbolically reached by an arrow – "Wendy fluttered to the ground with an arrow in her breast" (2010: 74) – as a symbol of the Roman god Cupid's arrows of love (2013: 80).

Maybe this is the only moment in the book where the female gender could be seen as standing over the male one.

The relationship between Peter and Wendy could stand, from a general perspective, for the relationship between men and women. As Deborah Cameron remarks, John Gray considers misunderstandings between the two sexes to be as common as if "men [were] from Mars [and women] from Venus" (2008: 80). At the beginning of the 20th century, though men and women came from the same planet, they were raised up and lived in totally different spheres - as distant as planets -, so it is not surprising that there were huge misunderstandings between them. For example, there is the fact that, at her age, Wendy already knows what a kiss is and has notions of romantic love. Meanwhile, Peter knows nothing about feelings, and even despises them, because as a boy he has been raised to be brave, courageous and adventurous. Therefore, it is comprehensible that when Peter tells his story, Wendy becomes more fascinated with the idea of living far away from the domestic sphere, surrounded by fantastic creatures, than with Peter's courage:

She gave him a look of the most intense admiration, and he thought it was because he had run away, but it was really because he knew fairies. Wendy had lived such a home life that to know fairies struck her as quite delightful. (2010: 32).

Tedious talk this, but being a stay-at-home she liked it. (2010: 33)

The same situation in reverse occurs when Wendy expects Peter to be in love with her instead of with her mother's stories: "[...] she was just slightly disappointed when he admitted that he came to the nursery window not to see her but to listen to stories" (2010: 36). On the other hand, Wendy and Tinker Bell, both women, understand each other perfectly: "Again Tink replied, 'You silly ass.' Peter could not understand why, but Wendy understood" (2010: 36).

Women and housework

The separation of the masculine and feminine spheres is visible in the distribution of activities between male and female characters. While males are directly related to adventures, fights, and bloody deaths - violence in general -, females are always led away from violence and activities implying much movement. When women are in danger, as they often are in the book, they limit themselves to crying or to looking for a man's protection. They are only entitled to what was considered 'women's work' at the time: housework and children upbringing. For example, as Maria Tatar notices, sewing and mending are activities exclusively performed by female characters, especially Mrs Darling, Wendy and Tinker Bell (2013: 20). "[Mrs Darling] sat down tranquilly by the fire to sew" (2010: 11). In Wendy and Peter's first encounter, Wendy is in charge of sewing Peter's shadow, because he is a boy that not only does not sew but, conveniently enough, does not even know what that is: "'What's sewn?' he asked. [...] 'I shall sew it on for you, my little man,' she said" (2010: 29). And still she worries: "'Perhaps I should have ironed it,' Wendy said thoughtfully" (2010: 30). When Peter becomes the captain of the Jolly Roger, as Wendy is the only woman aboard, she is in charge of making Peter's new clothes, even if she does not want to: "when the new suit was ready, which, against her will, she was making for him out of some of Hooks wickedest garments..." (2010: 181). But what may be more significant is the way Peter persuades Wendy to go to Neverland. While to John and Michael he talks about pirates, Indians, and adventures, to Wendy he talks mainly about being a mother and a servant to him and the Lost Boys: "'you could tuck us in at night' [...] 'And you could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us.'" (2010: 38)

Once the Darling children are living in Neverland with Peter and the Lost Boys, Wendy becomes a kind of mother-servant while the boys have fun. And not even when

Wendy is hurt, does she have the right to leave her duties aside: "Michael proposed, 'let us wake her and get her to make supper for us'" (2010: 78). Still, when the boys can do something for her, like a house where she could live, it is surprising for the London boys: "For Wendy?" John said aghast. 'Why, she is only a girl'" (2010: 78). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that while the Lost Boys and Peter Pan live in their home under the ground, Wendy is not allowed to live there. She can go down and clean, prepare meals and take care of the boys, but cannot live there. This symbol of the separate spheres is, at the same time, a more meaningful symbol. As Barrie himself acknowledged (in Tatar 2013: 71), this admits a second reading according to which Peter Pan is a kind of dead boy and the Lost Boys are actually all the babies that mothers have lost to death. Thus it is comprehensible that their home is set under ground, like a tomb, and Wendy, a young lady just about to enter puberty and able to generate new life, cannot live underground with the dead. She needs to live in the surface so as to be able to create life one day. At this point, it must be acknowledged that this, like the question of maturity, is a surprisingly positive reading of female characters in the book, which implies a curious contrast with the general attitude of the text.

Another example of how bound women are to domestic work is Tinker Bell's name itself. As Maria Tatar notices, Tinker Bell is named after kitchenware because "she mends the pots and kettles" (2010: 34). And, at the end of the book, the agreement by which Wendy and Peter will be able to see each other again is "to let Wendy go to him for a week every year to do his spring cleaning" (2010: 196). No other child is allowed to return to Neverland again but Wendy, for she is a girl and the narrator considers women rather childish beings. But also because "one girl is more use than twenty boys" (2010: 31), which means that a woman is only useful because she can

clean – “do the spring cleaning” –, feed and care for the male gender, and thus she is used almost as a slave or an object.³

Another difference between the male and female worlds are also the places where they live. As has been stated earlier in this paper, men and women cannot live together under the same roof. And this applies also to the fairy Tinker Bell, who has her own private apartment separated from the rest of the house by a curtain. The boys’ home under the ground is described as a great communal room almost empty of furniture, "rough and simple" (2010: 20), but it is practical and has living elements in it - like mushrooms or a Never tree constantly growing - and it is perfectly integrated with nature. However, Tinker Bell's apartment seems to be cut off from the rest. It is full of design custom made furniture and well combined. Its description pays attention to the most trivial and superficial aspects of the room, and the resulting description is quite different from the almost sentimental description of the boys' home. However, according to the narrator, Tinker Bell likes it because it reflects her personality perfectly.

Children growing up

Eventually, all the Lost Boys and the Darling brothers lose their capacity to believe in magic, and hence their capacity to fly. But "Michael believed longer than the other boys, [...] he was with Wendy when Peter came for her at the end of the first year"(2010: 197). Michael is the last to lose his faith because he is younger and while the rest leave their childhood behind, he still has a few more years to enjoy it. However, Wendy ends up being the only one who keeps her faith until the end, though she is the

³ However, Tatar draws attention to the fact that there is a man in *Peter Pan* that does housework and sews (2013: 96). It is Smee, a pirate portrayed as effeminate and who acts as a kind of mother to the bunch of pirates.

eldest of all, which is perceived as the right thing by the narrator. But this can also be interpreted as a judgement against women: it amounts to saying that women, even though they grow up physically, keep on being like children psychologically. This seems to be the narrator's justification for all the times women are left behind for not being 'suitable' for what was considered a 'men's world'. Even young Michael is able to make the rational hypothesis of an adult about Peter Pan when he disappears, while Wendy is not: "Perhaps there is no such person, Wendy!" (2010: 198). No child feels ashamed of having grown up and constructed an adult life but Wendy when Peter comes back: "He was a little boy, and she was grown up. She huddled by the fire not daring to move, helpless and guilty, a big woman" (2010: 203). She is the only one who feels guilty of a change that no human being could ever avoid: the fact that all children grow up: "I couldn't help it. I am a married woman, Peter!" (2010: 205)

Once again, the reader gets an echo of the way of thinking of the time: a girl truly becomes a woman by acquiring the civil status of a wife: "She had believed in him [Peter Pan] at the time [she was a child], but now that she was married and full of sense she quite doubted whether there was any such person" (2010: 9). At the end of the book, what marks that the Lost Boys and the Darling brothers are men is that they have a higher education and start to work, while what transforms Wendy into a woman is the fact that she is married: "[...] and when they met again Wendy was a married woman, [...] Wendy was grown up" (2010: 199). Nevertheless, she is able to remember Peter, as a sign that she keeps being a child mentally, even though she has grown up physically. All the other children that went to Neverland have forgotten Peter, the fairies and the island completely.

The figure of the Mother

Peter Pan also reflects the mentality of its time in the belief that being a woman and being a mother are equal terms. As Shipley states, "the role of the mother is the first and most important role for women to attain" (2012: 156). In fact, for Wendy's house, Peter grows roses and brings babies alike: "*Oh, really, next I think I'll have / Gay windows all about, / With roses peeping in, you know, / And babies peeping out*" (2010: 81). Mainly, a mother turns out to be a woman, married to a father – a man –, that does housework, worries about children and tells stories. Thus, for Jonathan Padley, the main characters who represent maternity are Mrs Darling, Wendy and Nana (2012:3).

One of the duties of Mrs Darling as a mother is to put order in her children's minds: "It is the nightly custom of every good mother after her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things straight for next morning" (2010: 6). This activity of putting their thoughts in order becomes something physical like tidying up a room, and it is related to housework. Maria Tatar sees a parallelism between this domestic housework of tidying up and the bringing up of children (2013: 27). This parallelism, she says, reinforces the idea that both tasks are women's responsibility.

As children imitate what they see in their parents, thus Wendy and John, the two eldest children, are discovered playing to be a family. They pretend to be their parents, Mr and Mrs Darling, and they are 'giving birth' to their children, themselves:

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

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

Wendy had danced with joy, just as the real Mrs Darling must have done (2010: 16).

This game anticipates how Wendy is about to go to Neverland to play the game of being a mother to the Lost Boys. Here, the game reflects the children's representation of what they perceive in their parents. As the reader has already been told about Wendy's and the boys' births, the narrator seems to be drawing attention to the difference between the real event and the way it is interpreted by the children. For the children, it is the father who gets the children and brings them to the mother, making the happy announcement of their coming. So the mother is full of joy. But the tone of the narrator could be interpreted as ironic, given the fact that the real event was not like that. Actually, it is as if Mrs Darling had the children by herself and Mr Darling had to accept them in the family – by calculating if they could afford the economic burden of having children. In the end, it is Mrs Darling who has to persuade her husband to have children, at a time when no other thing was asked of women than having descendants.

Another image of Wendy as a mother is shown in the opening chapter of the book. When the narrator describes the different Neverlands that exist in the mind of each child, he says: "Wendy had a pet wolf forsaken by its parents" (2010: 8). This wolf that Wendy adopts in her Neverland is an anticipation of Wendy's role in the actual Nerverland, where she is going to become stepmother to a bunch of children apparently forgotten by their parents and who, in turn, have forgotten them. In the second chapter, she meets Peter Pan because she is woken up by his sobbing, just like a mother is woken up by her baby's crying: "His sobs woke Wendy, and she sat up in bed" (2010: 27). The relationship between Wendy and Peter will become a difficult one due to the differences between men and women's perception already mentioned in this paper. From Wendy's point of view, Peter is her platonic love, a boy for whom she feels affection and tries to captivate from the very beginning, as she would do to get a husband. Nevertheless, for Peter, Wendy is a friend and even a mother, due to the fact

that the only female figures to which Peter has been attached are motherly figures, like his mother or Tinker Bell, who in spite of other characteristics that have already been mentioned, belongs to the people who sheltered and protected him when he ran away from home, the fairies. Thus, in the big game played in Neverland, Wendy takes up the role of a mother to the Lost Boys and to Peter but also of a wife to Peter - and, although Peter thinks of it as game, he accepts it himself: "'Ah, old lady,' Peter said aside to Wendy [...] 'there is nothing more pleasant of an evening for you and me when the day's toil is over than to rest by the fire with the little ones near by'" (2010: 122). This combination of the roles of mother and wife in the same person hints at a possible Oedipus complex in the character of Peter Pan.

Wendy is introduced to maternity at an early age when the Lost Boys ask her: "O Wendy lady, be our mother", to which she answers: "but, you see I am only a little girl. I have no real experience" (2010: 38). Tatar points out that Barrie's mother also had to take in the responsibilities of a mother when she was eight and her mother died. Since then, she had to take care of the house and her younger brother on her own. Thus, Wendy's adventure in Neverland actually reflects Barrie's mother's life. Once Wendy becomes a mother, she starts both scolding the children and acquiring the role of a storyteller. With little effort, she performs Mrs Darling's role in Neverland, replacing her in a sense.⁴

Several times along the book, the narrator and Peter show contradictory feelings towards the figure of the mother, most likely a reflection of Barrie's own contradiction:

⁴ Also the pirate Smee, though a male, could be seen as a mother to the pirates, with Hook as father. He is associated to housework, and thus associated to women and mothers:

Perhaps the sewing machine brought it to his mind. For long he muttered to himself, staring at Smee, who was hemming placidly, under the conviction that all children feared him. [...] There was not a child on board the brig that night who did not already love him (2010: 159).

Actually, Smee is the only pirate loved by children because of his maternal attitude.

"For one thing he despised all mothers except Wendy" (2010: 90). "You see, the woman had no proper spirit. I had to say extraordinary things about her; but I despise her [...]" (2010: 183). "I won't be able to say nasty things about her after all. [...] I like her best" (2010: 185). "'Don't have a mother,' [Peter] said. Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very over-rated persons" (2010: 29). This contradiction might be caused by the relationship that Barrie had with his mother⁵. Hence his ambivalent feeling of love, because she was his mother, and hate, because she did not care about him at all. Still, Peter Pan often cries while sleeping, maybe because he misses his mother. So these feelings of love and hate are also transformed into envy when the Darlings, and even the Lost Boys, go back to London and to their homes, while Peter returns to Neverland alone, as an orphan.

To summarise, going to Neverland, for boys, means exploring the land and living adventures while for a girl, like Wendy, Neverland has the same duties as staying at home, maybe even more as Wendy has to grow up from girl to mother. However, the narrator sees no problem in it – and neither does Wendy. Wendy is happy to serve the boys:

I suppose it was all especially entrancing to Wendy, because those rampageous boys of hers gave her so much to do. Really there were whole weeks when, except perhaps with a stocking in the evening, she was never above ground. The cooking, I can tell you, kept her nose to the pot (2010: 87-88).

And she even prefers to devote the little free time in which she could relax and have some fun to continue serving the boys: "Wendy's favourite time for sewing and darning was after they had all gone to bed. Then, as she expressed it, she had a breathing time for her; and she occupied it in making new things for them" (2010: 88). What is to boys an escape from real life, where they can forget about their duties and free themselves

⁵ J. M. Barrie was the sixth of ten children, and when David, his mother favourite's son, died, she isolated herself from the world. Barrie himself had to dress up in David's clothes to get some reaction from his mother.

from the oppression of society, turns out to be quite different for girls. Wendy is almost enslaved from the very beginning, but she seems to feel lucky and very happy, although she has no rest or a moment to think about herself. Thus Neverland turns out to be more like a 'prison' for women. They are not allowed to leave their duties or to forget the real world and what society expects from them. Hence Wendy is the link between Neverland and London, and when the Darling boys start forgetting about their home and their parents, it is Wendy who keeps their memories alive and makes them remember and go back home: "and nobly anxious to do her duty, she tried to fix the old life in their minds by setting them examination papers on it" (2010: 89). She is the only mature and responsible being in Neverland. What is a place for boys to never grow up in, becomes a place where Wendy matures.

The Father

On the contrary, no such attention is paid to paternal figures in *Peter Pan*. Padley states that "although paternity exists emblematically in Peter Pan in the persons of Peter, Mr Darling, and Captain Hook, this existence is in fact illusory because [...] none of these three proves to be a successful father" (2012: 5).

Maria Tatar highlights that Mr Darling is a clown from the very beginning - the way he makes calculations, his 'punishment' in the kennel, etc. His necessity to tell Wendy about the passion and admiration that her mother has for him ("Mr Darling used to boast to Wendy that her mother not only loved him but respected him", 2010: 2) transforms him into a comic figure that needs more attention than children do. In fact, as Tatar points out, his anxiety for his economy when they start to have children reflects his fear of losing Mrs Darling's attention and of being replaced by the next generation. Mr Darling's childish attitude is reflected also in his tendency to repeat words and

phrases or in the way Mrs Darling has to help him to tie his tie: "Let me try, dear," she said, and indeed that was what he had come to ask her to do [...] She tied his tie for him, while the children stood around to see their fate decided" (2010: 18). Finally, the narrator admits his condition: "Of course, as we have seen, he was quite a simple man; indeed he might have passed for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness off" (183-184). But, unlike for women, there is no reproof for his childish behaviour. In a sense, Mr Darling's self-inflicted punishment of living in the kennel is a gift. He gets all the attention he wants and becomes some kind of celebrity, having interviews, signing autographs and being invited to dine. But while her husband is enjoying their children's disappearance, Mrs Darling can only wait at home, sad and worrying they will not come back again. However, the narrator sees no problem in this double morality. This is a very clear inclination of how strong the link between women/mothers and the household is.

Mr and Mrs Darling's punishments are not comparable. Even Mrs Darling doubts about her husband's punishment actually being a punishment:

'But it is punishment, isn't it, George? you are sure you are not enjoying it?
'My love!'
You may be sure she begged his pardon; and then, feeling drowsy, he curled round in the kennel (2010: 187).

It is Mrs Darling who has to beg pardon for ever having doubted it.

Peter Pan himself appears as a makeshift paternal figure just in contraposition to Wendy's motherly role. Thus, the Indians start calling Peter "The Great White Father" (2010: 116) for saving Tiger Lily from the pirates, confusing the roles of a father and of a hero. Although he plays the role of a leader better, the figures of the father and the ruler are intertwined. "Always he said 'Peter Pan has spoken', it meant that they must now shut up, and they accepted it humbly in that spirit" (2010: 117). "She [Wendy] was

far too loyal a housewife to listen to any complaints against father" (2010: 117). In the case of Captain Hook, also a leader, Padley sees that "there is still something of a primal fatherhood [...] about Hook's verbally alluring, visually impactful, and allusively carnal presence" (2012: 4). He presents as a proof the fact that Wendy is hypnotized by him because she sees in him "the first credible example of manhood [...] in the story" (2012: 5). However, Hook's potential parenthood seems to be amplified by his links with Mr Darling: even though it is not noticeable in the book, in *Peter Pan's* stage version it is traditional for both characters to be played by the same actor.

To conclude the last two sections, it can be highlighted that, as Padley states, however old or young, "all the characters, with the possible exception of Nana, display childlike or childish behavior at some point" (2012: 5). Nevertheless, while men's childish behaviours seem to be justified, women's are attacked.

The story lives on

For Wendy to become a mother, her own mother, Mrs Darling, has to die. And this is all the space that the narrator devotes to her: "Mrs Darling was now dead and forgotten" (2010: 200). Once she does not have children to look after, because all of them have grown up and have their own families, she is of no use, so the narrator does not let her continue living – not even in the memories of her relatives, for she is "forgotten". A mythic understanding of life and regeneration would hold that Wendy's daughter, Jane, has to come to retake her mother's task – the spring cleaning. Thus, as Wendy is old and of no use for him any longer, Peter transfers his affection to Jane, the young version of her mother, symbolically showing how men stay while women are replaceable by younger and better version.

Just as Peter was known to her mother and grandmother ("Mrs Darling [...] after thinking back into her childhood she just remembered a Peter Pan", 2010: 9), Padley says that it "implies that he will be known to the children and grandchildren of Jane and his readers" (2012: 7). And for Rosemary Jackson: "it is [...] the very definition of Peter Pan that he will always return" (1991: 89).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, the narrator's attitude towards women could not be considered fair nowadays. Influenced by the separate spheres of the ending of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, women are relegated to the role of housewives and mothers, always servants to men. They are misinterpreted by an apparently male narrator who portrays them by means of the two traditional archetypes: 'virgins' and 'whores'. From this division comes a rivalry for male attention that does not allow them to team up when they are menaced (Shipley, 2012). The only woman well-considered by the narrator is the co-protagonist Wendy, whose journey to Neverland resembles the myth of Persephone, and makes her mature.

Though women are considered superficial and childlike, men appear to be no better. Obsessed with property and economy, and proving to be as immature as children, they are unable to fulfil their role as fathers. However, unlike women, they are never reproved for their attitude.

At first sight, the message transmitted by *Peter Pan* is not a very optimistic one for the female gender. It is not surprising that in the twenty first century other more egalitarian versions of the story of *Peter Pan* – written adaptations of the story for children of various ages, or the famous Disney's animation film adaptation of the classic – have prevailed in popular culture over the one provided by the original work.

Educational principles changed along the twentieth century and, what was at the time a tool to keep successive generations of young women under the control of men, is not acceptable any more. In fact it is considered dangerous to educate the new generations in values different from those of equality and democracy. Thus, the story of *Peter Pan* has had to be adapted in order to keep on telling children, just as the Geronimi, Jackson and Luske's 1953 Disney version already did, to have “faith, trust and pixie dust”, while at the same time leaving behind any male chauvinist connotation.

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