Peter Pan

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF J.M. BARRIE

James Barrie was born into a working-class religious family, the ninth of ten siblings. When James was 6 years old, his 13-year-old brother David died in a skating accident. James spent the rest of his childhood trying to cheer up his shattered mother – by writing stories, performing plays, and even wearing David's old clothes. After a bookish adolescence, James Barrie attended the University of Edinburgh and wrote for various Scottish newspapers and magazines. He wrote several novels and plays, but he didn't find literary fame until the publication of the Peter Pan series (the 1904 play and the 1911 novel). He married the actress Mary Ansell in 1893, but the marriage was unhappy and childless, and they eventually divorced. He died of pneumonia at age 77.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Much of the humor and sadness in Barrie's novel arises from the differences between society's idea of a child and an actual child. So in a certain way, the novel is founded on adult idealizations of childhood – a category of thought that began to emerge in the 17th and 18th centuries, when many nations first instituted compulsory elementary education (1646 in Scotland, 1763 in Prussia, and 1774 in Hungary, to give a few examples). As compulsory education expanded and spread, childhood became a more distinct period of human life. Compulsory education also coincided with the rise of the middle class, a population who could afford to bear children without putting them to work at an early age. In a sense, Barrie's novel was made possible by the convergence of these two historical events, which gave rise to many literary debates about children and childhood.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Books written expressly for children first appeared in the 17th and 18th centuries; they tended to be religious, moralistic, and didactic, and very bland in style. In the early 19th century, Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm travelled through various parts of Europe and collected traditional folk-tales, which they compiled into collections for children. Unlike the religious books, these stories had few discernible moral lessons but a great deal of darkness, violence, and excitement. They were beloved by children and adults alike. *Peter and Wendy* brings together the two traditions: it combines a moderate dose of Victorian morality with the wild, dark magic of the old folk tales. Barrie's popular book has since inspired dozens of cartoons, movies, and retellings, and the boy who didn't want to grow up has appeared in countless guises in the literature of the 20th century.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Peter and Wendy*
- **When Written:** 1904-1911.
- **Where Written:** London.
- **When Published:** 1911.
- **Literary Period:** late Victorian.
- **Genre:** Children's novel.
- **Setting:** London and Neverland.
- **Climax:** Peter's defeat of Hook.
- **Antagonist:** Captain Hook.
- **Point of View:** First person omniscient.

EXTRA CREDIT

Inspiration. Many of the novel's characters were likely inspired by the Llewelyn Davies boys. Barrie was friends with the five brothers and often played games with them in the Kensington Gardens. When their parents passed away, Barrie became their legal guardian.

Good works. James Barrie gave the rights to the Peter Pan works to the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital in 1929. When the copyright expired 50 years later, the British government granted the hospital the right to collect royalties on the works indefinitely, a rare exception to copyright law. To this day, the royalties comprise a large part of the hospital's funding.

PLOT SUMMARY

The story begins in the nursery of Darling home, where Mrs. Darling is "sorting through her children's minds" at bedtime. She is surprised to find that all the children have been thinking of someone named Peter Pan. When Mrs. Darling asks about this mysterious boy, Wendy explains that Peter sometimes visits them when they're asleep. One night, when she is resting in the nursery, Mrs. Darling wakes up to find that Peter Pan has indeed come to visit. When Peter notices an adult in the room, he jumps out the window, but the children's canine nanny, Nana, traps his shadow inside the room.

A few nights later, when the Darlings are dressing for a party, Mr. Darling quarrels slightly with the children and ties Nana in the yard, to everyone's dismay. When the Darling parents leave

for the party, the children are left unguarded, and Peter and Tinker Bell fly into the nursery. They are looking for Peter's shadow, which Mrs. Darling had hidden away in a drawer. When Tink gives Peter the shadow, Peter finds that he can't get it to stay on. His bitter crying wakes Wendy, who quickly sews the shadow on for him. Peter confesses that he has been listening in on the children's bedtime stories so that he could repeat them to the lost boys. He asks Wendy to come with him to Neverland, where she could go on adventures and be a mother to all the little boys. Wendy hesitates, but finally agrees. Peter teaches all three Darling children how to fly and they set off to Neverland.

After flying for several days and nights, they finally spot the island on the horizon. The island seems dark and dangerous. Pirates who also inhabit the island fire a gun at the group and everyone flies in different directions. Tinker Bell, who is jealous of Peter and Wendy's new friendship, uses the opportunity to try and get rid of Wendy: she tells the lost boys to shoot Wendy, and Wendy almost dies. But soon everything is well: Peter returns, and Wendy agrees to be the boys' mother. She cooks and cleans and mends clothes, and she has a wonderful time with it. The boys all love to have regular mealtimes and bedtimes, like regular little boys. Peter takes them on many wonderful adventures.

One night, Wendy is telling the boys their favorite bedtime story: it describes three children who flew away to Neverland, and who returned many years later to find their mother and father waiting for them with open arms. Peter doesn't like the story: he reluctantly explains that his own mother did not wait for him. Wendy becomes very upset and decides to take John and Michael home immediately. She invites all the boys to come, but Peter coldly declines.

As it happens, the pirates are waiting just above the children's underground house. When Wendy and the rest come out, they are all captured and taken to the pirate ship. Meanwhile, Peter is lying in bed asleep. Captain Hook, the leader of the pirates, slips down into the lost boys' house and poisons Peter's medicine. When Peter wakes up, Tinker Bell tries to warn him about the poison, but he doesn't believe her; at the last moment, she drinks the medicine herself. She grows weaker and weaker, but she is saved by the sound of children clapping all around the world. When she is well again, Peter sets out to save the others.

Hook and his crew have returned to the ship. They are about to make the children walk the plank, when suddenly they hear the ticking of the **crocodile** – the same crocodile that has been trying to eat Hook. The children see that it is Peter who is ticking, not the crocodile. Peter slips onto the ship, and in the ensuing confusion he and the children kill most of the pirates. When only Hook is left, Peter fences with him and finally throws him to the crocodile waiting in the water.

Soon, the Darling children come home to London. Mr. and Mrs. Darling are overjoyed, and they adopt all the lost boys except Peter, who returns to Neverland. Peter promises to take Wendy back to Neverland every year to do his spring cleaning, but he comes for her only twice.

Wendy and the other boys grow up. The boys get ordinary jobs, and Wendy marries and has a daughter named Jane. One day, Peter returns: he wants to take Wendy to do his spring cleaning, but she is too big to fly, so he takes Jane instead. When Jane grows up, he comes every so often for Jane's daughter, and so on forever.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Peter Pan – a magical, arrogant boy who will never grow up. Many parents look at their children and wish, along with Mrs. Darling: "Oh, why can't you remain like this forever!" And many children look at their parents with anxious appraisal and wish for the same thing. Peter Pan is the wish come true. Like all abstractions, he is in equal parts wonderful and terrifying. His immortality and wildness carry him to the dazzling limits of experience, but they take him away from its center, a safe, warm, and secluded place like the nursery. Peter has no fears, so he feels no desire for safety, and he has no memory, so he doesn't understand change or loss. And there is something else he does not have, though it is an emptiness that is more difficult to name. For convenience, J. M. Barrie calls it 'heartlessness', because without it there can't be anything like love.

Wendy – The eldest Darling child, a "tidy," practical girl with a soft spot in her heart for orphaned or abandoned creatures. From an early age, Wendy seems naturally disposed to care for others. When the lost boys tell her that they need "a nice motherly person," Wendy replies happily, "I feel that is exactly what I am": she is clearly delighted to complete this symmetry, to be no more and no less. But we also catch glimpses of a very different Wendy, hiding awkwardly behind the "motherly person." This other Wendy tries over and over for the '**kiss**' in the corner of Mrs. Darling's mouth, the kiss she "could never get," though Peter takes it without trying. She wants to fly and play with mermaids and say "funny things to the stars." And when she has grown into the mother she was always becoming, the other Wendy wants desperately for the "woman" whom she now lives inside to "let go" of her. Perhaps that desire will one day turn into a hopeless, mysterious 'kiss' of her own, forbidden to her own daughter as her mother's was forbidden to her.

Captain Jas. Hook – The pirates' fearsome leader. When we first meet Hook, he is a classic storybook villain: evil, hairy, and merciless, cruel even to his own crew. He despises Peter and the other children, and dreams of killing them all. Yet from the very beginning we are made to understand that Hook is not quite an ordinary pirate. His greatest viciousness is expressed

via politeness, his eyes are an intelligent, "melancholy" blue, and on close examination he looks like a distant member of the British royal family. Before Hook was a pirate, he belonged to a well-known family and attended a prestigious high school. His love for piracy and senseless violence is tempered by a nostalgia for simple ordinary propriety, for a sense of belonging in conventional society. Like the Darling children and the lost boys, he secretly longs to return to the real world, dreary as it may be.

Mrs. Darling – The children's mother, and the narrator's favorite, Mrs. Darling is a lovely, cheerful woman with a mysterious "**kiss**" in the corner of her mouth, like some leftover childhood magic. She adores her children and loves to care for them, and pines away when they leave her. To see them come home again is her greatest happiness.

Mr. Darling – A fussy, responsible family man. In the beginning of the story, Mr. Darling is always very practical, concerned primarily with money and keeping up appearances. Though he is sometimes childish and insecure, he demands respect from his wife and children, and usually they happily oblige him. But sometimes, when his feelings are hurt, he loses his temper and acts unfairly. He changes quite a lot after the children fly away: his guilt makes him re-examine his behavior and values, and he becomes more cheerful, easy-going, and sentimental, even "quixotic." Missing his children brings him back to his own childhood.

John – The middle Darling child. John tends to be cautious and conservative, a little ill-tempered, and sometimes cowardly. Wendy tells us that he "despises" girls, and he somewhat resents Peter for his kingly manner. In some ways, he greatly resembles Mr. Darling – he is precocious in the pettier aspects of manhood.

Tinker Bell – A tiny fairy companion to Peter Pan, a beautiful girl with a voice like a bell and a very sharp tongue. She fixes kitchenware and loves Peter jealously and intensely. She despises any girl that lays claim on Peter's affections, especially Wendy, and can be quite violent. She loves Peter so much that she almost dies to save his life.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Michael – The youngest Darling child, dreamy, sweet, sleepy, and forgetful. He takes to the magic of Neverland more easily than John, because he hasn't been shaped as much by ordinary adult society. He adores his mother but quickly forgets her.

Nana – The Darlings' dog, also a proud and conscientious nurse.

Tootles – The gentlest of all the lost boys, who has the misfortune of accidentally shooting Wendy.

Nibs – A light-hearted lost boy.

Slightly – A lost boy who always pretends to remember life on earth.

Curly – A lost boy who tends to get into trouble.

The Twins – Identical lost boys. Peter does not understand why they look alike, so they always feel self-conscious.

Smee and the pirates – Smee is the gentlest pirate; the rest are stupid, bloodthirsty, and generally loyal to their captain.

Princess Tiger Lily – The beautiful young queen of the lost boy tribe.

Jane – The daughter of Wendy after Wendy grows up.

Margaret – The daughter of Jane after Jane grows up.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

CHILDREN AND HEARTLESSNESS

When Jane asks Wendy why she can longer fly, Wendy explains that only children can fly – "only the gay and innocent and heartless." *Peter and Wendy* is a love song to children, but it is also a sad reproof, and a bitter clarification about what childhood and children are really like. Boring fairy tales and fatuous mothers like to pretend that children are little angels, but really children are selfish, conceited, and callous. These "rubbishy children" are very loveable, but they don't deserve our love.

The narrator tries hard to assume this severe stance, but he falters again and again. He is charmed by Michael's sleepy babble, by Slightly's transparent pretensions, even by John's bad temper; and he admires Wendy's precocious seriousness and Peter's wild bouts of courage. What exactly does the narrator mean when he calls children "heartless"? The Neverland children are full of enthusiasm and joy, they are full of sadness, fear, and certainly admiration: "I'm glad of you," Michael says touchingly to his mother. What is missing?

Children can feel "glad of" many things, but they don't feel loyal to anything. They are always ready to abandon their loved ones. They haven't learned yet that a loved person may change or disappear if one turns away from them: they haven't learned to identify the gladness of love with fear of loss. Their heartlessness is in fact an aspect of their innocence. And their adult hearts will be the reward of experience: when Peter's cautionary tale about mothers makes the Darling children realize that the parents they are glad of may one day disappear from their lives, they feel a sad ache, an early sign of the adult heart.

Peter has felt the ache many times in his long life and he has always forgotten it. His forgetfulness protects him from loss, and so allows him to stay a child forever. The cause of this forgetfulness is one of the book's most pressing mysteries: children are heartless from inexperience, but it may be that Peter is heartless by choice.

MOTHERHOOD

Peter Pan is the novel's hero, a boy so charming and brave that even his enemies find it difficult not to love him. Yet it is Mrs. Darling whom the narrator loves best. And it seems as though everyone *but* Mrs. Darling is fixated on mothers: Wendy, who wants to become one, Peter, who wants not to need one, the lost boys, who want simply to know one, and even the pirates, who admit with a dash of longing that a mother is like a Never bird who would die to save her eggs. And all but Peter agree that a mother is a person miraculously gifted at measureless, selfless love. They know that motherhood's dullest chores are all tuned to some sort of white magic, and that magic inspires in them a confused awe.

Mothers and children are bound by a painful symmetry, at once a likeness and a fierce deadlock. The sublime extreme of a mother's love is an inversion of the sublime extreme of children's indifference, children who are "ever ready, when novelty knocks, to desert their dearest ones." The magic of motherly love is commensurate to children's "heartless" magic, a likeness that creates deep sympathy between them. But the mother's magic quietly transforms the child: a mother longs to change a creature incapable of love into a person who can return love, a person no longer "gay, innocent, and heartless," a person who can no longer fly. Motherly magic envelops children's magic and slowly, lovingly wears it away.

Peter distrusts mothers because he believes that his own mother betrayed him, but he *dislikes* them because they turn children into adults. "Keep back, lady," he yells at Mrs. Darling: "no one is going to catch me and make me a man." This an odd remark: one would assume time to be the primary culprit, along with schools and workdays. But Peter is wiser than he may seem, and less innocent. Peter dislikes mothers because he knows that, in loving his magic, they would eventually take it away. Mothers know this too, and it is this awful knowledge that makes us love them.

THE FANTASTIC AND THE COMMONPLACE

An aerial view of the novel would show two distinct worlds: the ordinary, rule-bound adult world and the wild, magical child world, separated by several days' flying. An aerial view of a person's life might show a similar partitioning. But a closer look at the novel shows a different geography, and a different economy of magic. The adult and child worlds, the ordinary and the magical, are always in close contact. Sometimes they even exchange roles, like the lost boys and the indians, who sometimes "in the middle of a fight … would suddenly change sides."

In the adult world there is Mrs. Darling, who rearranges her children's minds at night; there are night-lights who "yawn" and sometimes fall asleep, and stars who shout things like: "Now, Peter!" There is a dog who behaves like a lady, and a man who sleeps in a kennel. Sometimes Neverland "comes too near" the adult world and strange boys break through. And in Neverland there are fairies who fix kitchenware, and pirates who worry about their outfits; there are times when the game of ordinary life is a more fantastic adventure than any of the wonders of imagination. The tragedy of growing up is qualified, minimized, by its partial but continual postponement. No one ever *entirely* grows up.

FAIRNESS AND GOOD FORM

Fairness and good form are two names for Peter's elusive quality of moral excellence, an excellence limited to various sorts of games. The narrator tends to prefer 'fairness,' and Hook, in his obsession with the British variant of aristocratic formality, names it 'good form'. These two terms bookend the whole spectrum of Peter's excellence: his insistence on "fighting fair," on maintaining equality between opponents, on the one hand, and his blissful unselfconsciousness on the other: "Peter did not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form." The two qualities fully come together in Peter's last fight with Hook, where he maintains both perfect fairness (when Hook drops his sword, Peter graciously hands it him) and a sort of gallant nonchalance. Peter is arrogant at times, but during public contests or games he is overcome by a blind devotion to the principle of fairness, accompanied by a flash of indifference to himself. It ceases to matter how "wonderful" and exceptional he may be; he is simply a contestant acting in accordance with a certain idea of justice. His self-regard is replaced by respect for a social organizing principle—the rules of the game and of fairness.

It seems absurd for Hook to suspect Peter of 'good form' – compliance with social conventions – because Peter seems wild and unsocialized, like Mowgli from the Jungle Book. He runs away because he "wants always to have fun" – to do just what he feels like. He runs away to escape integrating into a society that would frequently force him to act against his will and his pleasure. How, then, does the prince of Neverland come to be so devoted to the notion of justice, a trait and consequence of civilization? Hook admires Peter because his fairness is not deliberate, but intuitive, internal and inevitable - "the very pinnacle of good form." Peter takes himself out of civilization only to create one inside himself. To run away from one form of adulthood is to run face-first into another.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE KISS

When first introducing Peter Pan, the narrator tells us before anything else that Peter is "very like Mrs. Darling's **kiss**." He then tells us, as if to clarify, that Peter is beautiful, wild, and hateful toward adults. The "kiss" at the corner of Mrs. Darling's mouth is a dimple, a smile, a shadow, or perhaps something not visible at all, a charm and an inaccessible depth. Like Peter, the kiss is youth itself: the idea of youth detached from any of the particulars of youth, a visceral sense of childhood as distinct from any actual child. On Mrs. Darling, the kiss is a remnant of total freedom, a small part of her that is safe from the unmagical aspects of life, and inaccessible to unmagical beings (including Mr. Darling, and, sadly, Wendy). Only something of its own kind can apprehend the "kiss" – only Peter himself. But what happens then? Whether the kiss disappears forever once apprehended, like a thought that vanishes when pursued, is left mysterious.

THE CROCODILE

Readers often say that the ticking **crocodile** represents time – specifically, the movement of time that begins and ends a human life: "the clock will run down, and then he'll get you." The crocodile is both vicious and innocent in his pursuit, innocent in obeying a natural impulse and vicious in the narrowness of his goal. His viciousness is the ticking of time in his belly, which seems both to impel him forward, like the gears of a machine, and to set the terms of his eventual satisfaction. The clock is the agent, and the crocodile an obedient vehicle. Hook interprets the crocodile this way too, and so he cowers before him as though the crocodile were fate itself, the sum of death and time. Hook is deathly afraid, but his fear also has something comforting about it, because falling into even the most malevolent arms is a little comforting. Fate ensures that each of us falls into place in some grand model of things, a finally clear map of "good" and "bad" form. So Hook believes. But we as readers know it was not time *or* fate that set the crocodile in motion – it was Peter, who fed him Hook's arm. And the crocodile gets his full meal not when the clock runs down, but when Peter gives Hook a final shove. The crocodile's symbolic function as time, fate, and the inevitable is Hook's own invention, a trace of Hook's love for a vanished order. In the end, the crocodile's only symbolic connection to fate is his passive compliance in fulfilling his savage goal of getting Hook. There is nothing sacred about the crocodile's ticking: Peter can tick just as well and powerfully. What the crocodile, and Hook's belief in the crocodile's status as his fate, is that to impersonate fate is to become fate.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scholastic Inc edition of *Peter Pan* published in 2002.

Chapter 1 Quotes

He got all of her, except the innermost box and the kiss. He never knew about the box, and in time he gave up trying for the kiss.

Related Characters: Mr. Darling, Mrs. Darling

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 2

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we get a sense of J.M. Barrie's whimsy and inventiveness. We're told that Mrs. Darling (the mother of the book's main characters) has a "kiss" on her face. This kiss isn't exactly like the word readers are familiar with--instead, a "kiss" is a kind of dimple symbolizing childlike wonder and freedom. There's no way to explain a kiss--if there were, then anybody could have one, including boring adults like Mr. Darling (who tries, but cannot access, his wife's "kiss"). Instead, the kiss is a symbol of youth and its fleetingness, of unadulterated freedom.

As the passage makes clear, Mrs. Darling is still in touch with her childlike side. Some children feel closer with their mothers than with their fathers--they feel that their mothers understand their needs and desires better. By portraying Mrs. Darling as a close ally to her children, Barrie shows that he's a keen observer of human nature and family dynamics.

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, repacking into their proper places the many articles that have wandered during the day.

Related Characters: Mrs. Darling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis

Barrie portrays Mrs. Darling as a kind, loving mother. Like all good mothers, we're told, her duty is to make sure that her children are happy and contented as often as possible--even after they go to bed. Barrie chooses an interesting and inventive metaphor for this idea: he describes Mrs. Darling "sorting" through her children's minds and feelings.

It's interesting to note that Barrie begins his novel about a rebellious child by describing a happy, peaceful household. The children are loved and well cared for, and there are no traces of cruelty or poverty. In short, the children in the novel have no concrete problems-- as we'll see, their only "problem" is a vague desire (one that all children know) to get away from the house and have adventures.

She dreamt that the Neverland had come too near and that a strange boy had broken through from it. He did not alarm her, for she thought she had seen him before in the faces of many women who have no children.

Related Characters: Mrs. Darling, Peter Pan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Mrs. Darling is an adult, but she's also a kind, loving mother to her three children. As a result, she can vaguely remember Peter Pan. Peter Pan is a friend to all children: when children go to sleep, they go to Neverland and play with Peter Pan, the leader of children in Neverland. As they grow up, children forget about Neverland, and therefore about Peter Pan. It's a sign of Mrs. Darling's close connection to her children (and her still-present "kiss") that she can remember Peter, however vaguely.

The passage is interesting because it suggests that "women who have no children" have some kind of connection to Peter Pan. It may be that adult women choose to have children because they want to reunite with Peter Pan (or what he represents), and they want to introduce their offspring to the marvels of Neverland, which they encountered when they were little children themselves. Or perhaps the passage is meant to suggest that adults without children tend to be selfish and to relish their freedom--just like Peter Pan, we'll learn.

Chapter 3 Quotes

'It was because I heard father and mother,' he explained in a low voice, 'talking about what I was to be when I became a man.' He was extraordinarily agitated now. 'I don't want ever to be a man,' he said with passion. 'I want always to be a little boy and to have fun. So I ran away to Kensington Gardens and lived a long long time among the fairies.'

Related Characters: Peter Pan (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

Peter Pan explains how he came to be a (perpetually) little boy. When he was a child, he become disgusted with the adult world--he hated adults for being so big and heavy and boring. As a result, he decided to run away from home to live with fairies.

Peter's description is both amusing and a little disturbing. In theory, the idea of a child never growing up sounds cute and charming, and yet Peter's explanation for why he never grew up isn't so cute. Peter is interested in embracing the fun and beauty of being a child, but not as much as he's obsessed with *avoiding* the fate of adulthood. In other words, Peter hates adulthood more than he loves childhood.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Eventually Peter would dive through the air, and catch Michael just before he could strike the sea, and it was lovely the way he did it; but he always waited till the last moment, and you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life.

Related Characters: Peter Pan, Michael

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Peter Pan takes Wendy, Michael, and John off to Neverland, but when the children fall asleep, they fall to earth. Peter saves them whenever they fall--and yet he seems to be doing so just to show off. The children sense that he's more interested in proving that he's powerful and quick than he is in getting to know his new friends--indeed, the three children have to keep reminding him who they are.

The passage begins to suggest that Peter might not be as

wonderful as he's cracked up to be: for all his superhuman powers, he's vain and narcissistic, and seems not to care about other people very much. Perhaps it's because so many of Peter's visitors grow up and abandon him that Peter has learned not to make close friends with anyone. Or perhaps Peter has just gotten used to being the unquestioned leader of the other boys and girls.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ The difference between [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.

Related Characters: Peter Pan, Tootles, Nibs, Slightly, Curly, The Twins

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Once Peter has transported John, Wendy, and Michael to Neverland, he introduces them to his followers, the other boys of Neverland. In Neverland, we quickly learn, Peter is the leader of the other children. And yet Peter seems curiously weak and gullible at times. Here, for instance, he and the children pretend that they're talking to a doctor. Peter thinks that the doctor is real--he's so used to living in an imaginary place (and he himself is imaginary) that he can't distinguish between imaginary and real.

Barrie makes a surprisingly complicated point here. The boys are in Neverland, and yet their fantasies continue to be imaginary; when the children conjure up a doctor, they *know* they're just pretending. Peter, by contrast, believes in Neverland completely--it may even exist at all because of him. His innocence and belief in the fantastical is both inspiring and a little sad.

❝ 'That doesn't matter,' said Peter, as if he were the only person present who knew all about it, though he was really the one who knew least. 'What we need is just a nice motherly person.'
'Oh dear!' Wendy said, 'you see I feel that is exactly what I am.'

Related Characters: Peter Pan, Wendy (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the boys of Neverland have built Wendy a house. Peter and the children discuss the possibility of treating Wendy like a mother.

There are a couple things worth mentioning here. First, notice that Peter clearly fancies himself the leader of the group, even when he's talking about things like mothers, which he clearly doesn't understand at all. Peter isn't as heroic or admirable a character as Wendy had hoped--he's a little irritable. Furthermore, it's interesting to note that the children clearly *want* a mother-figure in their lives. The boys of Neverland who have been separated from their mothers for some time might want to return to their mothers--pretending that Wendy is their mother is a kind of coping mechanism. The lost boys relish their freedom and lack of responsibility, but they also want a "nice motherly person"--basically to have it both ways. It's also interesting that Wendy seems to embrace adulthood (and already looks forward to being a mother), yet she is given access to Neverland, and becomes friends with Peter. It's as if even Peter himself wants a mother sometimes.

Chapter 8 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Peter Pan

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Peter clashes with Captain Hook. Peter is fighting the Captain, but the Captain uses "dirty tricks" to hurt Peter. Peter is stunned that his opponent is cheating--cheating, Peter knows, is unfair. The narrator describes how most children never really get over the first time someone treats them unfairly--afterwards, they wise up and realize that life isn't fair. Peter, however, always forgets when

people treat him unfairly--thus, he always remains a child.

The passage is interesting because it suggests that maturity comes with realizing that there is injustice in the world. Once a child realizes that he's been mistreated he starts to realize that he's not the center of the universe--that there are other people in the world, who are looking out for their own interests, and sometimes they act "unfairly." Peter, the eternal child, never has such an epiphany, and so he retains his pure moral compass, but he also never really matures.

Chapter 10 Quotes

"You are so queer,' he said, frankly puzzled, 'and Tiger Lily is just the same. There is something she wants to be to me, but she says it is not my mother.'

Related Characters: Peter Pan (speaker), Wendy, Princess Tiger Lily

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Peter deals with his own emotional immaturity. Peter senses that the women in his life (Wendy, Tinker Bell, Tiger Lily, etc.) want to be "something" to him. But because Peter has almost no experience interacting with the opposite sex, he has no way of conceiving what this "something" might be.

As we can deduce, Barrie is talking about love and attraction--the girls in the book have crushes on Peter. But Peter, perpetually immature, can't reciprocate the girls' feelings--he's so youthful (and so obsessed with himself) that he can never summon the maturity or desire to love someone in return. Barrie suggests that maturity consists largely of being able to love someone else--young people like Peter are so narcissistic (even if in an innocent way) that romantic love never occurs to them.

Chapter 11 Quotes

"See, dear brothers," says Wendy, pointing upwards, '"there is the window still standing open. Ah, now we are rewarded for our sublime faith in a mother's love."

Related Characters: Wendy (speaker), Mrs. Darling, John, Michael

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Wendy tells the children of Neverland a story. In the story, a group of children fly away from home, only to find that, years later, their parents continue to love them and have left a window open for their return.

The story is interesting for a couple reasons. First, the very fact that Wendy is telling the children a story suggests that she's maturing, playing the part of a leader and a guide to the other children. Wendy's new authority among the children is also reflected in the content of her story--Wendy associates herself with motherhood by celebrating mothers in her story. Wendy is still very much a child, of course (she's still in Neverland, after all), but she's clearly starting to pine for her home--hence her story's ending.

Off we skip like the most heartless things in the world, which is what children are, but so attractive; and we have an entirely selfish time; and then when we have need of special attention we nobly return for it, confident that we shall be embraced instead of smacked.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Peter has just finished listening to Wendy's story about loving mothers. Peter is angry with Wendy for telling "lies," and insists that mothers are cruel, and ignore their children when they fly away to Neverland. When Wendy insists that she and her siblings must return to their home right away, Peter is hurt, but he pretends not to care. In short, Barrie says, Peter is being "heartless"--he's a purely selfish creature, who just wants Wendy to spend time with him. Peter is such a child that he expects Wendy and the other boys to pay attention to him forever.

Barrie is remarkably cynical about children and what children are capable of. While he clearly adores and related to children, he also acknowledges that kids are basically selfish--like Peter, they just want other people to pay attention to them. Peter is particularly selfish because he's a "pure" child--he's given up on growing up altogether.

Thus children are ever ready, when novelty knocks, to desert their dearest ones.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

In this surprising scene, Wendy prepares to leave Neverland with her siblings, John and Michael. As Barrie describes the scene, he makes a note about children: in spite of their innocence and morality, they can be surprisingly callous and cruel. Indeed, children are often perfectly willing to lose the people they hold "dearest." Many children have such short attention spans that they can abandon a loved one when something better comes along, and only regret their actions later, if at all.

Barrie's description of childhood might sound harsh or cynical, and yet the passage has a positive point: Barrie suggests that growing into an adult isn't so bad after all. Most children are frightened of growing into adults, because adulthood seems like "a drag." Barrie suggests that adults, in spite of their many flaws, are capable of greater acts of goodness and kindness than children. Children are naturally good, and yet they're also selfish and quick to abandon their loved ones. Adults, by contrast, can be incredibly loyal to their loved ones. (Mrs. Darling is a great example.)

Chapter 13 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Peter Pan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 142

Explanation and Analysis

Barrie describes the dreams that Peter has on some nights. Surprisingly, Peter's dreams are fitful, nightmarish, and altogether unfit for a child.

Why are Peter's dreams so vivid and so frightening? Barrie suggests that Peter can't handle his own existence--a "riddle" that he's ill-equipped to solve. Peter has no mother or father, and in spite of what he claims, his lack of parents seems to cause him great torment and jealousy (even if his torment only comes out in his dreams). Being a child is a mess of contradictions: children are both arrogant and humble, selfish and generous. Most kids learn to figure out their own contradictions by spending time with their parents, spending time with their peers, and growing up. But Peter can never grow up--and so he's doomed to experience the same contradictions in his personality via his nightmares.

He regretted now that he had given the birds of the island such strange names that they are very wild and difficult of approach.

Related Characters: Peter Pan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

In this funny passage, Peter considers the birds of Neverland, whom Peter himself has named. Peter's friends have just been abducted by Captain Hook and his gang of pirates, and Peter is trying to think of a way to rescue them. He regrets giving the birds such complicated names, since their names *make* them wild and frightening.

The passage could be interpreted as childish nonsense, but there's actually a complex point here. On some level, Peter knows that Neverland is imaginary (and he's imaginary, too)--but he refuses to admit it consciously. Peter has invented most of Neverland, so the names he gives to the creatures of Neverland determine what kind of creatures they are--thus, a bird with a wild name *is* wild. One could say that Peter is both a king and a slave to Neverland: he's the king of his own fictional universe, and yet he's unable to fully accept that the universe is fiction.

Chapter 14 Quotes

There was little sound, and none agreeable save the whir of the ship's sewing machine at which Smee sat, ever industrious and obliging, the essence of the commonplace, pathetic Smee.

Related Characters: Smee and the pirates

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

As the chapter begins, we're introduced to Captain Hook in more detail. Hook surveys his ship, the *Jolly Roger*, which is surprisingly calm and orderly. One would think that a pirate's ship would be overflowing with action and fighting--on the contrary, Hook's ship is pretty orderly.

Why such an orderly ship? Since Hook is a symbol of the antagonism of the adult world--basically everything Peter hates--it's only appropriate that his ship should be neat, boring, and "industrious." Peter Pan despises rules and orders of any kind--that's why he's living in Neverland in the first place. Hook's ship is a reminder of the sinister power of the adult world's rules and laws (at least as they might appear to a young child).

Most disquieting reflection of all, was it not bad form to think about good form? His vitals were tortured by this problem. It was a claw within him sharper than the iron one.

Related Characters: Captain Jas. Hook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn a little about Captain Hook's inner life. Hook thinks of himself as a fine, upstanding adult, trapped in a world of children. He's obsessed with rules and manners, and the highest praise he can think of is referring to something as "good form." But Hook has a problem: he can't think about "good form" without weighing the possibility that it's "bad form" even to think about "good form."

Hook's conundrum is a little bit nonsensical--and that's the point. Hook himself is a cartoonish parody of the adult world--too obsessed with manners, and too wrapped up in the contradictions of good behavior. The parody isn't particularly detailed or insightful (we're not told which rules of politeness Hook is so concerned about, for example) because Hook represents the adult world *from the perspective of* a child like Peter Pan. The core of the passage is that even though Hook aspires to be "good," relying on manners and politeness to do so, he can't escape the fact that he's an adult, and (unlike a child) can never be intuitively good without thinking about.

Chapter 15 Quotes

'Pan, who and what art thou?' he cried huskily.
'I'm youth, I'm joy,' Peter answered at a venture, 'I'm a little bird that has broken out of the egg.'
This, of course, was nonsense; but it was proof to the unhappy Hook that Peter did not know in the least who or what he was, which is the very pinnacle of good form.

Related Characters: Peter Pan, Captain Jas. Hook (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

Here Peter Pan and Captain Hook have their climactic "showdown." As he stabs Hook in the ribs, Peter tells Hook that he is the embodiment of joy and youth.

Peter's claims seem nonsensical--after all, we've seen that Peter can be selfish and narcissistic to the extreme. And yet Peter possesses an innate goodness and innocence simply because he's a young child--without any effort, he is a "good person."

The passage reinforces Captain Hook's greatest fear. As the embodiment of the adult world, Hook is obsessed with the question of how to be good and proper. But no matter how hard Hook tries, he'll never manage to be intuitively "good," as Peter is. For all his vanity, Hook can never match Peter's natural innocence and instinctive morality.

The other boys were flying around him now, flouting, scornful; and as he staggered about the deck striking up at them impotently, his mind was no longer with them; it was slouching in the playing fields of long ago, or being sent up for good, or watching the wall-game from a famous wall. And his shoes were right, and his waistcoat was right, and his tie was right, and his socks were right.

Related Characters: Captain Jas. Hook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

In this poignant passage, Captain Hook--at this point wounded in the ribs, and sensing that he doesn't have long to live--imagines the days when he was only a child, long ago. Hook is surrounded by young boys who attack him, and furthermore, Hook seems unable to defend himself from the boys' attacks--Barrie notes that his sword is "impotent." As Hook draws closer and closer to death, he daydreams about his carefree youth.

To quote the movie *The Wild Bunch*, "We all dream of being a child again, even the worst of us. Maybe the worst most of all." Hook, in spite of his fanatical devotion to adult rules and laws, secretly wants to be a child--or at least to return to the natural "good form" of childhood. The passage's mention of Hook's dignified clothes is a little ambiguous, then--it's possible that his association of childhood with such order and formality means that he never really got to enjoy his own childhood freedom, or it could mean that for Hook, childhood's "good form" means that one's clothes are naturally "right," without having to try so hard.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ If she was too fond of her rubbishy children she couldn't help it. Look at her in her chair, where she has fallen asleep. The corner of her mouth, where one looks first, is almost withered up. Her hand moves restlessly on her breast as if she had a pain there. Some like Peter best and some like Wendy best, but I like her best.

Related Characters: Mrs. Darling, Peter Pan, Wendy

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 180

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Barrie describes Mrs. Darling, a woman who feels an unqualified, complete love for her children, no matter who they are or what they do. Barrie's description is Mrs. Darling is poignant because it emphasizes her tenuous connection to the world of children: her "kiss" (the dimple on her mouth) is almost gone--i.e., her connection to the gentle world of youth is dangling by a thread. Furthermore, the passage emphasizes Mrs. Darling's mortality--note the descrption of the "pain in her breast" (some have suggested that Barrie based Mrs. Darling on a beloved friend who was dying of tuberculosis).

The passage is important because, in claiming that he likes Mrs. Darlin best, Barrie is ultimately throwing his sympathies to the world of kind, empathetic adults, not the world of children. Barrie loves children, and understands them deeply. And yet in the end, he believes that children should not resist growing up to be adults--kind, fun, and gentle adults, with responsibility to other people (above all, to their own children).

❝ He ceased to look at her, but even then she would not let go of him. He skipped about and made funny faces, but when he stopped it was just as if she were inside him, knocking.

Related Characters: Peter Pan, Mrs. Darling

Related Themes:

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

Peter Pan flies to the Darlings' house, intending to shut the window so that Wendy will believe that her parents have forgotten her. But when Peter see Mrs. Darling crying herself to sleep, he's touched. He tries everything he can to makes Mrs. Darling cheer up--but nothing works. Her love for her children is so complete that she won't be happy until they return to her home.

The passage has Peter showing a rare flash of maturity--instead of selfishly tricking the Darling children into staying Neverland, he decides to let them rejoin their mother, recognizing that it's the right thing to do. Furthermore, Peter feels a little of Mrs. Darling "inside him," suggesting that, perhaps, he's developing the tiniest bit of self-awareness and maturity.

❝ He had ecstasies innumerable that other children can never know; but he was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred.

Related Characters: Peter Pan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

Peter has allowed the Darling children to return to their home, and he watches sadly as John, Wendy, and Michael

embrace their mother--the scene is brimming with joy and love. Peter is sad because, in spite of the joys of Neverland, he'll never be able to enjoy the pleasure of having a mother and father. Peter has left his family long ago--his disgust for adults everywhere (and his parents' supposed refusal to let him back through the window) has separated him from family forever.

Note that the passage specifies that Peter is barred from the *joy* of having a family, not the literal *circumstances* of having a family. There's a very subtle difference between family happiness and the mere fact of having a family: Peter claims that his parents have abandoned him (and maybe they have), but in part, Peter *chooses* not to have a family; he *chooses* not to feel the pleasures of loyalty, love, and responsibility.

Chapter 17 Quotes

He took Mrs. Darling's kiss with him. The kiss that had been for no one else Peter took quite easily. Funny. But she seemed satisfied.

Related Characters: Peter Pan, Mrs. Darling

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Peter leaves Wendy and the Darlings for a year: he's flying back to Neverland alone. But Peter takes one memento of his time with the Darlings: the "kiss" hidden in Mrs. Darling's face.

The meaning of Mrs. Darling's "kiss" is so ambiguous that it's difficult to tell exactly what Barrie is trying to say in this passage. Peter has been craving a mother-figure in his life, though he's always denied it. Now, Peter is flying back to Neverland with a tiny sign that he *does* have a mother--Mrs. Darling. Mrs. Darling may not be his literal mother, but she gives him love and affection, a reminder that Peter is still a little boy, and needs a mother. Peter continues to live in Neverland, but Barrie suggests that he's finally gotten some of the parental love he's always been denied--and in the process, learned to respect the world of adults (or at least be a little confused in his dislike of it).

Wendy was grown up. You need not be sorry for her. She was one of the kind that likes to grow up. In the end she grew up of her own free will a day quicker than other girls.

Related Characters: Wendy

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of the story, the Darling children return to their day-to-day lives--and in the end, they grow up to be adults. The big question that Barrie poses at the end of his novel is: is growing up bad? Barrie insists that becoming an adult need not be so bad. For someone like Wendy, being an adult has all kinds of advantages. Wendy was always a good leader and a natural mother, who liked to take care of other people. Thus, Wendy's transition to adulthood isn't a hideous curse (as Peter Pan sometimes seemed to think)--rather, it's a blessing, as well as a natural part of life.

The passage further suggests that children who grow up into adults willingly are the most compassionate and sensitive ones. Selfish, wild children like Peter never grow up because they're too concerned with themselves. Wendy, on the other hand, cares too much about taking care of others to want to remain a child forever.

It is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly.

Related Characters: Wendy (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Barrie sums up his point: to be a child is joyful, exciting, but also incredibly selfish. Children, he's shown, are blessed with a natural sense of morality and innocence. But children are *also* selfish and fickle--they tend to care about themselves far more than they care about others. Only adults can truly care about other people in a lasting, responsible way.

Ultimately, Wendy grows up into a woman because she genuinely cares more about other people than she cares about being young and happy. Wendy is a surprisingly noble character--she loves Neverland, but loves other people more. She's a natural adult and a natural mother--not just to Peter, but to her own child, Jane.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: PETER BREAKS THROUGH

When Wendy is a little girl of two, she understands from a wistful comment of her mother's that she will not stay a child her entire life. Like all children she will one day become an adult.

Wendy's mother is troubled, if only a little, by the way her child will disappear into an adult, but two-year-old Wendy accepts the inevitability peacefully.

Wendy's mother, Mrs. Darling, is pretty and imaginative, with some mystery about her. The mystery seems to reside especially in one corner of her mouth, where a "**kiss**" – a sort of dimple –seems to hide itself even from loved ones, including Mr. Darling. Mr. Darling does not mind that he can never have the kiss in the corner of her mouth. Instead he is satisfied to know that his wife respects him – for his knowledge of economics, among other things.

Mrs. Darling's "kiss" is not an ordinary kiss. The term seems to be an invention of Barrie's, and it indicates both something visible, the elusive charm of a smile, and something invisible, a kind of childlike freedom from ordinary life. In one corner of her mouth, at least, Mrs. Darling remains free and wild. She kisses her husband—an action of a grownup—with the other corner.

Some time after the two are married, they have three children: Wendy, John, and Michael. They can just barely afford the children on Mr. Darling's salary. Even so, they want everything to be proper, so they hire a nanny – a large Newfoundland dog called Nana. She is an excellent caretaker in all respects, but other children's nurses gossip meanly about her, and Mr. Darling worries that such an employee (i.e. a dog) might affect his reputation. He also worries that Nana does not respect him sufficiently, but Mrs. Darling always assures him otherwise. They are, in general, a happy, jolly family.

As the Neverland world of the children is unsettled sometimes by the unmagical behaviors of adults, the world of Mr. and Mrs. Darling is unsettled by the fantastical winds of Neverland. Tedious concerns about respectability go hand in hand with magical dogs. The Neverland island sometimes comes very close to the adult world, and the adults have grown quite used to its influence, though they would not admit it.

Mrs. Darling first learns of Peter Pan late one night in the nursery, where she is performing the daily task of putting her children's minds in order. Like all mothers, she sorts through her children's' feelings of the day, putting the meaner ones at the bottom and the nicer ones at the top.

Mrs. Darling's motherly chores are a delightful mixture of tedium and sorcery. Like all mothers, she is always cleaning and sorting, a very dull sort of activity. But she is also delicately altering and nurturing her children's minds.

The map of a child's mind is the map of that child's private Neverland, a colorful, magical place full of dangers and joys, and also ordinary everyday things. Wendy, John, and Michael each have their own Neverlands, but as they are siblings their Neverlands have "a family resemblance." Most of the time Neverland is very delightful, but just before bed it becomes too real and very frightening. Children travel there often, but adults can never return there.

Mrs. Darling has several windows into Neverland, a place where adults are generally forbidden. But then Mrs. Darling is not quite fully adult, owing to the "kiss" at the corner of her mouth. She is not afraid of Neverland, though the children are afraid sometimes, when fantasy's incursion on reality feels like an attack.

One day Mrs. Darling asks Wendy to explain Peter Pan, a person she has noticed in the children's minds. Mrs. Darling vaguely remembers Peter from her own childhood as a little boy who lived among the fairies. She thinks he must be grown by now, but Wendy insists that he is a child just like her. Not long afterwards, Mrs. Darling finds some very unusual leaves on the nursery floor. Wendy explains that Peter must have been visiting them while they were asleep.

Like many adults, Mrs. Darling seems to have impressions and memories from childhood that now seem impossible to her. Though they are her own memories, her adultness requires that she write them off as fantasy. She is forced to narrow her scope of the possible, to bring it into line with an insistent, overwhelming realism.

The next night, Mrs. Darling falls asleep over her sewing in the nursery after the three children have gone to bed. She dreams that a boy has "broken through" from Neverland and come very close to the real world. While she is dreaming, a boy enters the nursery through the window. A light flickering around him wakes Mrs. Darling, who looks at Peter with surprise. He looks just like her mysterious "**kiss**", and still has all his baby teeth.

Mrs. Darling can dream of Neverland just as well as the children. Her dreams are not 'merely' fantasy, as she believes, because in this case they come true. The phrase "broken through" suggests that some force or violence is involved in crossing from the imagined world to the real world, and that few can make the journey.

CHAPTER 2: THE SHADOW

Mrs. Darling gives a startled shout when she sees the boy, and Nana runs into the room and growls. Peter quickly jumps out the window, but Nana traps his shadow by closing the window on it. Mrs. Darling folds it carefully into a drawer in the nursery in case he ever comes back for it.

An old superstition tells us that demons have no shadows. Peter Pan has a shadow, but it is detachable. The other characters do not seem to have detachable shadows, yet nobody is surprised to see one come off.

She doesn't tell Mr. Darling about the shadow until the following Friday. The ill-fated evening begins in an ordinary way. Michael is refusing to take a bath, and Mrs. Darling is dressing for her evening out. Wendy and John are pretending to be Mr. and Mrs. Darling on the day of John's birth. Mr. Darling comes in complaining about his tie, which he can't get to tie properly, and Mrs. Darling ties it for him soothingly. Then they all dance around.

Children and childhood are the most important topics in this book, but the adults on the sidelines also seem to have a wonderful time. Is it the adultness of their daily life that is enjoyable, or the traces of childhood that remain in it? Similarly, do Wendy and John enjoy playing adult, or do they enjoy bringing childhood into adulthood?

Nana bumps into Mr. Darling and gets some hair on his pants, and he begins to criticize her capacities as a nurse. Nana has come in to give Michael his medicine. To encourage Michael to take it without complaint, Mr. Darling brags that he has always taken his medicine very bravely. Wendy helpfully suggests that Mr. Darling take his medicine along with Michael. Mr. Darling had hidden the medicine, because he hates it, but Wendy had found it and put it back in its place. He is unhappy to see Wendy bring it into the room. He promises to take it at the same time as Michael takes his; but when Michael swallows his spoonful, Mr. Darling hides his behind his back. Everyone is very disappointed.

Though Mr. Darling is balding, financially savvy, and a father of three, he sometimes has trouble acting properly adult. He is often silly, and he doubts that his family respects him. As an adult, he is meant to be extremely honorable and brave – braver than the toddler Michael. But his aversion to foul-tasting medicine is identical to Michael's. He is supposed to pretend otherwise, but he can't manage it. He and the children both dislike watching the child/adult distinction break down.

To distract from his embarrassment, Mr. Darling tries to play a clever trick. He pours his creamy-colored medicine into Nana's bowl. Nana drinks a little and then gives Mr. Darling a very reproachful look. Everyone is angry with him, and he is angrily embarrassed, and finally he demands that Nana be tied up in the yard. He takes her out and ties her up himself, despite her anxious barking – she is afraid to leave the children unguarded, with a person like Peter Pan lurking around.

The difficult task of acting like an adult, and therefore ignoring the natural impulses of a child, leaves Mr. Darling with a very mixed-up sense of self-worth. Because he can never quite believe himself to be fully adult – and neither, he suspects, can the others – he has a chronic pain in his ego. Sometimes it becomes acute and he does mean and foolish things.

Mrs. Darling sadly puts the children to bed. Nana is barking loudly outside, and Wendy explains that the dog senses danger. Mrs. Darling is anxious, but she gathers herself, says goodnight, and leaves with Mr. Darling to a nearby party. When they are safely out of the way, the stars signal to Peter to come indoors.

Adult realism blinds the Darlings. The dog and the stars and the child know something the adults don't know, or choose not to know, or are forced by their own adulthood not to know.

CHAPTER 3: COME AWAY, COME AWAY!

The light flickering around Peter Pan is a tiny fairy named Tinker Bell, who begins looking for Peter's shadow as soon as they fly into the nursery. When she speaks it sounds like many little bells, and it is incomprehensible to ordinary humans. She tells Peter that his shadow is in the chest of drawers. But when he tries to put his shadow back on, it will not stick. He begins to cry in frustration.

Peter is an impossible magical being. But when we ask "what is Peter Pan?" we are really asking "what is a child?" For Peter, at first, seems to be a child without any trace of adulthood. Wendy begins to become an adult at only two years old, when she sacrifices the dream of being a child forever. But Peter never seems to sacrifice any dreams, or acquire any adult traits.


Wendy wakes up and they introduce themselves. She is surprised by Peter's short name and his explanation of directions to where he lives: "second to the right and straight on till morning." She is especially shocked that he does not have a mother. When she understands why he is upset, she decides to sew the shadow onto his heels herself. As soon as it's done, Peter becomes very pleased with himself: he thinks all the credit is his. He has a very short memory, and he is very arrogant.

In the short time that Peter has spent in the nursery, he has caused a lot of trouble: he has been careless about Tinker Bell and ungrateful to Wendy. He has hurt them both, if only a little, because he does not know how to consider the feelings of others. But they love him anyway because of his child's charm, and even to them that love is mysterious.



Wendy takes offense at his ingratitude and hides in bed. Peter Pan then becomes apologetic and tells her "one girl is more use than twenty boys." Wendy is very flattered and emerges from under her blanket. She offers to give him a **kiss**. When Peter does not understand what she means, she gives him a thimble instead, and he gives her a button. She puts it on a chain around her neck for good luck.

Wendy is just as susceptible to flattery as Peter Pan, since she, too, is a child and has not completed her transformation into adulthood. Does Peter really mean what he says? He is trying to win her forgiveness, so the compliment seems deliberate. Is Peter capable of deceit?

Peter tells Wendy that he ran away from his father and mother to live with the fairies in Kensington Gardens, so that he doesn't ever have to become a man and can have fun forever. He explains that fairies are born from babies' laughter, and that a fairy dies every time a child says she doesn't believe in fairies.

An eternal child seems like a very grand and moving thing. But Peter's motivations do not seem to be very grand. He is repelled by adults, by their largeness and heaviness and the boredom of their lives. He does not see anything of value there, and that is his *blindness.*

Suddenly he realizes that Tinker Bell is stuck in a drawer, and laughs a very wonderful childish laugh. When he lets her out, she is angry and rude, but Wendy is enchanted nonetheless. "She is a quite a common fairy," Peter says, explaining that Tink repairs kitchenware. Peter goes on to say that he lives in Neverland with the lost boys, children who fall out of baby carriages. He hints that they need a girl to take care of them. Wendy is so pleased that she gives him a real **kiss**, which she calls a thimble, and Peter gives her one in return. Tinker Bell pulls her hair jealously.

Just as Mrs. Darling is a little bit of a sorceress, Tinker Bell is a little bit of a drudge. Though Neverland is an imaginary place, it still has chores. Perhaps it is unsatisfying to imagine a place entirely free of drudgery, even for a child. Peter goes to Neverland by choice, but the other children go by necessity – because they have no real homes.

Peter tells her that he has been coming to the nursery to listen to stories, since neither he nor the lost boys know any good stories. Wendy tells him the end of Cinderella, which Mrs. Darling has been reciting for the children at bedtime, and when Peter jumps up to go tell the other boys she begs him to stay – she can tell him many more.

Peter Pan and the lost boys live out real fairy tales, but they are still desperate to hear one told. They have gone on numberless adventures, but they still feel that they have no stories of their own. They need a storyteller.

Peter asks Wendy to come with him and tell stories to all the boys. He tempts her by describing Neverland magic, and all the motherly tasks she could perform there. He also promises to take John and Michael along. Wendy wakes up her brothers and tells them Peter Pan is here and he is going to teach them to fly. Meanwhile, Nana is barking loudly to alert the Darling parents to the danger in the nursery. Finally, she breaks the chain and runs to the party where they are spending the evening. The Darlings rush back to the house at once.

Peter Pan is generally quite contemptuous of mothers. He thinks mothers are unnecessary, and cause a great deal of trouble and annoyance. But he is clearly asking Wendy to come be a mother to him and the other boys. Does he need her to perform simple but boring tasks, like sewing? Does he need her to perform a certain kind of motherly magic, like Mrs. Darling's mind-sorting? Or does he just want a mother?

Meanwhile, Peter shows the children how to fly. He blows some fairy dust on them, tells them to wiggle, and up they go. As soon as they get the hang of it, they decide to fly to Neverland at once. By the time the Darlings reach the bedroom, it is empty.

Fairies are created from children's laughter, and fairy dust must be made of the same thing. To make them fly, Peter blows childlikeness at the children. He makes them more fully children.

CHAPTER 4: THE FLIGHT

Wendy, John and Michael fly for many days and nights in the direction of Neverland. They don't know where they are but they closely follow Peter, who steals food for them out of birds' mouths. They fly easily, though when they happen to fall asleep they drop straight down. Peter saves them carelessly at the last minute, to show off. They are even a little afraid that he might forget about them and abandon them, and they wouldn't know how to find their way. He often seems to forget them after going off on an adventure, and they have to remind him who they are.

Peter has many inhuman powers, like the ability to communicate with fairies and the agility to steal from birds. But he also seems to lack many human powers. He likes Wendy and the two boys, but he cannot truly care if they live or die. He has poor memory because he has no sense of ordinary human time. Vast lengths of time contract into just moments for him, and anything but the current moment holds little meaning for him.

Finally they approach the shores of Neverland. The sun is setting, and the sun's rays are directing them to the darkening island. The children recognize the landscapes of their dreams, their huts, caves, and flamingoes. The sun is setting, and the island begins to seem very frightening and dangerous, as it does even at home when it is time to go to sleep. Peter becomes brightly alert in preparation for some violent adventure. He tells the children about the island's crew of vicious pirates. They obey Captain Jas. Hook, a fearsome pirate with a hook for his right hand, which Peter chopped off once during a battle.

Neverland is a place made in many children's imaginations. What is imagined becomes real there. Since the children recognize many of their own imaginings in the landscape, but also find much unfamiliar, we can infer that Neverland is a composite of all children's imaginations, a mismatched, possibly endless place. Its dangers are internal dangers, the frightening things that crawl out of the imagination when it is left unguarded.

Tinker Bell tells Peter that the pirates have seen them, and they've pulled out a big gun called the Long Tom. If Tinker Bell continues to light their way, the pirates will fire directly at them, but she cannot put out her light except when she is asleep. Finally, the children decide to conceal her in John's hat. But soon enough, the pirates fire at them anyway, and the blast blows them apart. Peter drifts out to sea, Wendy shoots up with Tinker Bell, and the two boys fly somewhere else entirely. Tink decides to play an awful trick on Wendy, and Wendy follows her helplessly.

Neverland welcomes the children by trying to kill them. Children are fascinated by their own deaths, by the possibility of dying violently, and make up all sorts of monsters and villains. They are also fascinated by all games of hide-and-seek, by the possibility of being discovered. As often late at night, they are a tiny light trying to hide from the suddenly dark parts of their imagination.

CHAPTER 5: THE ISLAND COME TRUE

When Peter is away from Neverland, everything becomes quite peaceful and lazy, and nobody fights very much. But now that Peter has returned, the island has become lively. Everyone is hunting someone else: the pirates hunt the lost boys, the indians hunt the pirates, and the wild animals hunt the indians. "They were going round and round the island, but they did not meet because all were going at the same rate."

Without Peter, the island is peaceful. If the island is a composite of children's imaginations, then the island in Peter's absence is representative of children on average. We can say, then, that even in comparison to other children, Peter is very warlike and violent.

The lost boys, walking quietly in single file, are looking for Peter Pan. There are currently six boys on the island, but the number varies, because every once in a while they die in battle or "Peter thins them out." The first in line is Tootles, who often accidentally misses out on the best adventures. The next in line is Nibs, a carefree boy, and then Slightly, who loves to dance and to reminisce about earthly life, though he doesn't remember any more than the others. The next in line is Curly, who tends to get in trouble, and finally the Twins, who confuse Peter, who doesn't understand why they look exactly the same, and they are therefore always a little embarrassed.

The word "Neverland" has in modern culture come to mean something like a children's paradise. But the Neverland of J. M. Barrie's novel is not paradise at all. For one thing, children are killed there, and sometimes, it seems, Peter himself kills them, just to "thin them out." Or perhaps he simply sends them back to the real world – it is ambiguous. It is a world both more free and more dangerous than an ordinary child's world because it is a pure child's world, unaffected by the moderation of adults.

Next come the pirates, ugly, tattooed, and murderous, and the bo'sun Smee, who is oddly mild and loveable (a bo'sun is a sort of servant). Captain Hook is awful and handsome, with black hair, blue eyes, and a terrible scowl. He wears somewhat refined clothes, which suit his aristocratic features, smokes two cigars at the same time, and fears nothing except his own blood, "which was thick and of an unusual colour." He kills easily and often. Right then, he kills one of his crew with his hook – just for bumping against him.

It is often said that childhood was invented in the 18th and 19th centuries, because in earlier periods of human history almost all children had to work just as hard as adults. But when middle-class parents could afford to let their children play and be leisurely, childhood became a more distinct period of life, and children became a topic of discussion. Many people believed that children were sweet, innocent angels.

Next come "redskins" of the Piccaninny tribe, carrying many scalps. Their leader is Princess Tiger Lily, a very beautiful girl. All sorts of hungry wild animals follow in their tracks, and the last of them is a huge **crocodile**. Then everything has come full circle, and the lost boys appear again. They talk about Peter, wonder about the ending of Cinderella, and try to remember their mothers – they can't talk about mothers in front of Peter, "the subject being forbidden by him as silly."

The Neverland in Barrie's book is a real children's world. It is not a paradise for angels, nor a playroom full of silliness and laughter. It is a thrilling, dark place. If there is one thing that characterizes Neverland, it is intensity. The children don't merely walk, they fly; they don't "play rough," they kill; the pirates are as horrible as can be, and the princess as beautiful as can be.

Just then the boys hear the pirates singing and quickly disappear into their underground house, which they enter through trees with holes in the trunks. Each boy has a tree of his own – seven in all. The pirates have often tried to discover this house, and this time one pirate sees Nibs disappearing into the woods (Nibs is going out to investigate). Hook is determined to find the entrance this time and he tells all the pirates to scour the area.

Yet the violence of the children's world is distinct from the violence of the adult world. Violence in the adult world is most often arbitrary, senseless, and unfair. The Neverland children believe in fairness, and their violence is subject to a code of honor. That's why the pirates don't simply slaughter the children when they see them: they must first outwit them.

Hook is left alone with Smee, the bo'sun, and he tells Smee obliquely and sentimentally about his life. Hook wants badly to kill Peter, who cut off his arm and fed it to a **crocodile**. To this day, the crocodile is trying to finish the meal. Hook has been able to avoid the crocodile till now, because it has a ticking clock in its stomach that he can hear and therefore avoid, but he states that he will be in trouble once the clock stops ticking.

Though we have already said that Neverland is not a toy-room, the real crocodile with real bloodlust is wonderfully toy-like: its ticking is a fair warning to Hook, a delightful structural fairness. Death is simply a part of the game in Neverland – not, as in life, an incomprehensible end to it.

Suddenly Smee jumps up: he has been sitting on a mushroom that has grown unusually hot. When the pirates uproot the mushroom, they see smoke and hear children's voices. The boys use the mushroom to plug their chimney when strangers are around. The pirates also notice the seven holes in the trees, and they hear the boys talking about Peter's absence. Captain Hook decides to get them by leaving a very rich and delicious cake on the shore of a lagoon where they like to play; since they don't have a mother to tell them to eat in moderation, they will eat too much and get very sick and die. The pirates break into celebratory song, but then Hook hears the ticking of the hungry **crocodile** and they all run off.

The story won't allow us to forget that Hook, like the rest of the island, is a child's invention. There is some very large adult evil missing from a pirate who plans to kill children with delicious cake. Hook's origin in children's imaginations is significant both with respect to his relative innocence and his capacity for horrific violence, which likewise is children's handiwork. Hook also reflects the children's anxieties about mothers: it is fair, to them, that Hook plans to kill them with cake, because they believe their motherlessness to be their weakness.

Nibs runs out of the woods. He is being chased by wolves, and the other boys run out to help him. They chase off the wolves by bending over and looking at them through their legs, because that is what Peter would do in the situation, and the wolves retreat in confusion.

The island's wolves are also children's inventions. In the children's world, confusing behavior is just as effective a weapon as a dagger. A dagger is more innocent there, and strangeness is more potent.

When they are safe, Nibs tells the other boys that he saw a large white bird flying through the sky and calling "Poor Wendy." Soon they see the bird flying toward them, and they see Tinker Bell scolding and pinching it. Tink tells the boys that Peter wants them to shoot the bird, and Tootles obediently shoots Wendy with an arrow. She falls to the ground, an arrow in her chest.

The boys obey Peter Pan just as blindly and fearfully and admiringly as the pirates obey Hook. It is interesting to note that, in the beginning of the 20th century, J.M. Barrie seemed to believe that hierarchical structures and absolute authority were a natural part of children's imaginations.

CHAPTER 6: THE LITTLE HOUSE

The boys all gather around Wendy, and they realize she is not really a bird. Tootles is very sad to have killed a lady. Suddenly they hear crowing, which is Peter's special noise. Peter Pan himself lands nearby. He is surprised to see the boys so quiet and sad, and he tells them he has brought them a mother. Tootles solemnly leads Peter to Wendy's body.

Peter often says that he does not much like mothers, but he goes to some lengths to find a mother for the lost boys. He thinks the boys do need a mother, since they are only ordinary children. Peter believes that not wanting a mother sets him apart from the others.

When Tootles takes responsibility for the death, Peter Pan almost stabs him with an arrow. But Wendy's hand holds him back. She is alive: Peter's button, which she wears as a necklace, stopped the arrow from hurting her too badly. When Peter learns that the accident was Tink's doing, he tells her that he never wants to see her again; but right away he takes pity on her and reduces the length of her exile to a week.

Peter's love, or lack of love, orchestrates every aspect of this story. Tink's jealous desire for Peter's affection makes her plot Wendy's death, and Peter's button, a "kiss," saves Wendy's life. Peter is one of the magical beings of Neverland, but he is also its main architect. He is the imaginer, and the imagined.

The boys decide to build a house around the very spot where Wendy lies, so as not to disturb her. They bring her nice things from their underground home and build a cabin of branches and leaves. A very sleepy John and Michael fly in, and they get to work too. Peter asks Slightly to get a doctor, and Slightly reappears in a moment wearing a doctor-like hat and pretends to cure Wendy. Peter speaks to him just as he would to a doctor, because to him there is no difference between reality and make-believe.

Peter does not see a difference between reality and make-believe because, as one of the imagined creatures, he himself is make-believe. And as the island's main imaginer, Peter's powers of make-believe are greater than those of the other boys, who, after all, do feel a little hungry after a pretend dinner. They are not quite as imaginary as Peter: they do grow up.

The boys quickly finish Wendy's house, and they make it just as she asks them to: it has red walls, a green roof, roses, and windows. Then they politely knock on the door. Wendy opens it, and they all introduce themselves. They beg her to be their mother, since they very much need "a nice motherly person." Wendy says she is just that, and happily agrees. She tucks them in and reads them a bedtime story, and they happily fall asleep.

Why do the boys need a mother, or a motherly person? Of course, most of the boys have very vague memories of their mothers, and the memories probably make them feel lonely. But we might also say that they remember the games and rituals of motherhood, and they long for them as for a toy that other children have.

CHAPTER 7: THE HOME UNDER THE GROUND

The next day, Peter measures Michael, John, and Wendy and makes tree holes to fit their figures. The underground home is one large room. There is a tree growing in the middle that serves as a table, though it has to be cut to size every day; there is also a fireplace, a bed, and a little hole in the wall for Tinker Bell, which is very beautifully decorated. Wendy works hard cooking the boys' meals, though these are sometimes only make-believe meals - as Peter wishes. Wendy also spends a lot of time fixing the boys' clothes. She complains about all the work, but she takes a lot of pleasure in it. In her imaginary Neverland she had a pet wolf, but in the real Neverland she has a real one, and he keeps her company.

Make-believe food on an island of make-believe is not so different from real food on a real planet. At least it is not different for Peter, who is almost entirely make-believe himself. Perhaps make-believe on an island of make-believe is just a step down into the depths of make-believe: perhaps levels of make-believe continue infinitely there, a Neverland at each step. Peter, then, might travel easily between them. It would explain his seemingly endless adventures, his forgetfulness, and his strange sense of time.

Wendy does not think too much about her parents, because she is sure they will always keep the window open for her and her brothers if they decide to return. But she is worried that John and Michael seem to be forgetting them, so she gives the boys quizzes on their old home to try to stir their memories. All the boys take the quizzes except for Peter, who can't read or write.

The lesson here is that parents always remember children, and that children always forget them. All that parents give, children take away. The selflessness of parents is just proportionate to the selfishness of children.

For a little while, Peter becomes very absorbed in a new game. It "consisted in pretending not to have adventures," and in doing ordinary everyday things that all children do, like going on walks or just sitting around. All the while, though, he sometimes leaves to go on mysterious, violent adventures. He often does not remember them, though, and he sometimes makes up adventures that did not really happen. The narrator wants to describe one, but he is not sure which to choose, and begins to list several.

Peter enjoys pretending to be an ordinary child, perhaps because he feels the real adventure of being a child with parents and a home is forbidden to him. The question is: does he need Wendy to help him with the game of ordinariness, or does he need her in some simpler way? And is there truly a difference between the two? The game of ordinariness is tinged with real longing.

Once, in the middle of a battle with the tribe, the boys all decide to be indians, and the indians all decide to be boys. After switching sides, they continue the battle. There is also the story of Wendy and the cake: Wendy never lets the boys eat the overly rich cake, no matter how many times the pirates tempt them with it, and finally it just gets hard and old. There is also the story in which a Never bird saves Peter Pan from drowning in the lagoon, or the story of Tink's attempt to get rid of Wendy, or Peter's attempt to battle with some disinterested lions. The narrator tosses a coin to choose among them, and begins to tell the story of the Never bird and the lagoon.

The first story in the list shows us very clearly that a very large share of the violence that takes place on the island is free of hatred. It is fighting for fighting's sake, an extreme version of the many gallant violent arts (like boxing and other combat sports). A similar lesson may be derived from the story of Peter and the lions. The story is a direct reference to a chapter in Cervantes' Don Quixote, in which Quixote challenges two sated and lazy lions who refuse to fight.

CHAPTER 8: THE MERMAIDS' LAGOON

The lagoon, begins the narrator, is a little like the colors you see if you close your eyes very tightly. Wendy, Peter, and the lost boys spend many warm days swimming there, and listening to the mermaids singing. The mermaids don't speak to anyone except Peter, but they sun themselves and comb their hair. At midnight the lagoon becomes a very dangerous place and the mermaids start to howl, but by then Wendy and the boys are always in bed.

The narrator is being slightly coy here – the lagoon is, *in fact, the colors inside children's eyes. The island and the lagoon are products of children's' imagination, and just as certain parts of the imagination are inaccessible to its possessors, certain parts of the island are inaccessible to the children. Peter, though, can travel to its most remote areas.*

Wendy always makes sure the boys take a half an hour's rest after lunch, and on this afternoon the boys are napping on Marooners' Rock. Peter senses that pirates are nearby and wakes the others. Everyone dives underwater. Approaching is a boat carrying two pirates and Princess Tiger Lily. The pirates caught Tiger Lily snooping on their ship, so they leave the princess on Marooners' Rock to drown. Peter might have let the pirates leave Tiger Lily and rescued her once they were gone, "but he was never one to choose the easy way". Instead, he addresses the pirates in Hook's voice and orders them to let the princess go. The confused pirates obey fearfully and set the princess down on land.

What does it mean, Peter's aversion to "the easy way"? We know that Peter is very arrogant, and therefore likes performing difficult and impressive feats. But Peter is also always strictly fair, and allergic to any form of sneaking or deceit. Deceit, for him, is distinct from a trick the way a lie is distinct from a game. Does Peter sometimes risk others' lives to fuel his arrogance, or out of loyalty to his idea of noble fairness?

But in a moment Hook's actual voice sounds over the water. Hook swims to the boat and climbs in. He sighs sadly and tells the other pirates that the lost boys have found a mother. Smee does not know the meaning of the word, and Wendy exclaims in surprise and compassion. Hook points to a Never bird sitting on top of a nest that has fallen into the water, and explains a little wistfully that a mother never abandons her children. Smee wonders whether they might kidnap the boys' mother and make her the pirates' mother, and Hook agrees that it is a good plan.

We have said that in Neverland violence is free of hatred almost as a rule, and Hook is the 'almost.' Hook wants to kill Peter because he hates him, and perhaps it is his hatred – unique on the island – that renders him its one true villain. But even Hook is not a villain through and through; or, rather, a villain in Neverland need not be exclusively hateful. Hook is sentimental, and wants a mother like any other boy.

Hook asks about Princess Tiger Lily, and he is enraged to hear that the others let her go by his own orders. He thinks nervously that the order must have come from a ghost. Hook addresses the ghost, and Peter responds in Hook's own voice and manner. Peter asserts that he is Hook, and that Hook is a "codfish," which makes the other pirates look at Hook with some suspicion. But Hook and company ask Peter many questions, and since he can't resist talking about himself he admits that he is Peter Pan.

Peter attempts to switch places with Hook the way that the boys switch places with the indians. But neither Peter nor Hook are really willing to play the game. The little boys lose nothing by being other people, but Peter and Hook temporarily lose something they both cherish dearly – their egos. Hook does not play the game because loss of ego is too frightening, and Peter does not persist because recovery of ego is too appealing.

The boys and the pirates engage in a short and bloody fight. Peter and Hook meet at the top of Marooners' Rock. Peter is about to stab the pirate, but when he notices that he (Peter) is higher up and therefore has an unfair advantage, he gives a hand to Hook to help him up. Hook uses the lull to claw Peter twice with his hook. Peter is stunned by the unfairness, as all children are the first time they encounter it. After the first unfairness, a child is never the same – except for Peter, who always forgets it.

Fairness is the child's version of justice, which is meant to ensure that all people are treated equally and without undue bias. Peter's preoccupation with fairness means that he is concerned in every encounter to ensure that he and his opponent are equally matched. Yet Peter is quicker than Hook, and Hook is less scrupulous, so it is impossible to create equivalence between them.

In a minute Hook swims rapidly back to his boat: he is fleeing from the ticking **crocodile**. When the boys see Hook's frightened retreat, but cannot find Wendy or Peter, they assume the two have left already and happily fly home. But Peter and Wendy are still on the rock: Wendy has fainted from fear and exhaustion, and Peter is badly injured. The water is rising all around them. Wendy wakes up, and they discover that neither of them is in a condition to fly or swim to shore.

Nevertheless, Peter's movement toward equivalence is just as significant as Hook's movement away from it. The author writes that a child does not recover from his first unfairness; Peter recovers from unfairness instantly—he is always a child; he never learns that the world isn't fair.

Suddenly, they feel something small touch them: Michael's kite. Peter ties it around Wendy's waist and it carries her off to safety. Soon he is alone, and the mermaids begin to sing. For a moment he is afraid. But it passes: he believes that "to die will be an awfully big adventure."

Peter's life is an inscrutable series of adventures. He has had so many, and for so long, it seems he must be having at least several at a time. His time moves in leaps and jolts. So he has no reason to believe that the adventure of death will be his last.

CHAPTER 9: THE NEVER BIRD

Peter listens to the mermaids going to their homes and feels the water rising at his feet. Then he sees something small moving toward him through the water: it is the Never bird sitting on its nest. She wants to save Peter by giving him the nest, even though her eggs are still inside. Her motivations are a mystery, but perhaps "she was melted because he had all his first teeth."

The Never bird and Mrs. Darling both love Peter for his baby teeth. Peter is unalterable because he forgets everything, or perhaps it is the other way around. He is like the cloud made up of all children, whose ranks change but who go on existing forever. He is as incorruptible as an idea, and as changeable as the sea.

The bird tries hard to tell Peter to swim to the nest, which she can't bring any closer to his rock. But he can't understand her, and they become quite irritated with each other. The bird works very hard to bring the nest right to Peter's rock and then flies up. Finally Peter understands her. Nearby, a pirate's hat is hanging from a wooden pole in the water; the hat floats well, and Peter places the Never bird's eggs carefully inside the hat and sets it adrift. The grateful bird immediately lands on her eggs, and Peter uses the nest to float to shore. Soon, Peter and Wendy are home with the other boys.

Peter's devotion to the idea of fairness is a cipher for his emotions, an inscrutable quality that could indicate either kindness or heartlessness. Perhaps Peter saves the Never bird's eggs because he can see her care and anxiety, and because he can imagine how she would suffer if the eggs drowned. But perhaps he helps her simply because she helped him, because the rules of fairness require it. It is not necessary to feel anything in order to follow a rule.

CHAPTER 10: THE HAPPY HOME

Because Peter Pan saved Princess Tiger Lily, the boys are now friends with the tribe, who all keep watch outside the boys' home. The boys don't like the way the tribe idolizes Peter, but Wendy doesn't want to speak against him: "father knows best."

Peter Pan ran away from home so that he'd never have to become an adult, and so that he could remain a child. But when he escapes adulthood he escapes childhood too, and becomes a strange ageless "father" by becoming a kind of uber-child.

One night, which will come to be called the Night of Nights, the boys are eating dinner while Peter is out getting the time from the **crocodile**, whose clock regularly rings out the hour. The meal is a make-believe meal, and the boys are edgy. Peter comes home, and the boys crowd happily around him. They insist on dancing, despite Wendy and Peter's dignified protests, so the whole family sings and dances.

Peter and Wendy pretend to be something other than children when the lost boys ask them to dance. It's not because they dislike being children, but because they instinctively want to be something other than what they are, something strange and important. It's a child's desire, but it reaches beyond the boundaries of childhood.

Before the dance, though, Peter and Wendy have an odd conversation. They talk about the boys exactly as though they were their children for a pleasant moment, but then Peter asks Wendy to confirm that he is not really their father: "it would make me seem so old," he says nervously. Wendy confirms this coldly. She asks Peter what he feels for her, and he replies that his feelings are those of a son's, which makes Wendy sit as far from him as possible. "Frankly puzzled," Peter wonders what it is that Wendy and Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily all want him to be.

In the human world, to follow that desire is to go willingly into adulthood. Wendy has linked her desire to adulthood (as she understands it), but Peter Pan has followed the desire elsewhere. In Neverland, the adulthood and the elsewhere seem briefly to become one thing: the way to both places is an adventurous way. But adulthood is a game one can't stop playing, and Peter does not like to play any one game for too long.

Soon, though, they forget their differences and have a wonderful time. It is all the more lovely, says the narrator, because they don't know that it is to be their last. Wendy settles everyone into bed and begins to tell their favorite story. It is a story Peter hates, but he listens anyway.

The evening is lovely because it must end, and its brevity becomes its most significant quality in retrospect: its brevity becomes inextricable from its loveliness. The same could be said of childhood – for all children but Peter.

CHAPTER 11: WENDY'S STORY

Wendy's a story is about a couple called Mr. and Mrs. Darling, who had three children and a dog named Nana. When Mr. Darling tied Nana in the yard, the children flew away to Neverland. Wendy asks her listeners to think about the heartbroken parents, but the boys don't really care about them. The next thing that happens in the story, says Wendy, is that the three children return to their parents' home, but they are already grown-up. Their parents are there waiting for them with the window open – so "great is a mother's love."

Wendy's great mystery is the apparent ease with which she moves between the roles of the child and the adult. She believes in the love of mothers, and she also believes in the indifference of children – in their right to leave without a word, to stay away for a lifetime, and to receive love in return. In Neverland she is both a child, because she has left, and a mother, because she loves unconditionally.

The children are delighted by the story: as the narrator says, it allows them to do as they please in the safety of unconditional love. But Peter hates it. "You are wrong about a mother's love," he says to Wendy. He once felt about mothers as she did, he says; but when he returned to his old house one day, after many years of adventuring, his window was locked and there was a strange boy in his old bed.

Perhaps Peter's mother did forget him; but it is more likely that Peter stayed away for a hundred years, that it wasn't even his own family that lived there any longer. And even the ideal story about a mother's love cannot do away with the future. Peter's heartbreak about mothers may really be a knowledge of endings and a refusal to accept them.

Wendy is stricken with fear, and she decides that she and her brothers must return home that very night. She is not sure Peter is right about mothers, but she is afraid nonetheless. Peter is very hurt, but he pretends not to care. He heard that breathing very fast kills grown-ups, so he breathes as fast as he can. The lost boys are sad to lose Wendy, too, and even consider keeping her hostage until the gentle-hearted Tootles intervenes. Peter politely arranges for the tribe to guide them to shore, and for Tinker Bell to accompany them back to England.

Though Peter may seem to be acting merely petulant, his position is a tragic one. By telling Wendy that mothers are inconstant and unreliable, Peter has made his own mother of the moment inconstant and unreliable – at least with respect to him. He has been abandoned again. Perhaps Peter's heartlessness is not a form of inexperience, as it is for other children, but a defense against it.

When Wendy sees the boys' disappointed faces, she invites them to come with her. She assures them that her parents will adopt them all. They joyfully accept the offer – all but Peter. Wendy can see that he is miserable, but he pretends to be cheerful, and says goodbye with a chilly politeness. They are just about to go, when aboveground they hear the beginning of an awful battle between the pirates and the tribe.

With each moment, Peter seems more and more adult. What is childlike about forced politeness? The politeness is a form of excellence, but it is an excellence very far from the impulsive self-absorption of a child. It seems at times that Peter did grow up after all, in his own way.

CHAPTER 12: THE CHILDREN ARE CARRIED OFF

The pirates attack first, thereby breaking the rules of pirate-redskin warfare, which state that the indians always attack first. Many indians are killed during battle, but a small number, including Princess Tiger Lily, manage to escape. Hook is not really interested in the indians, though; he has come for Peter Pan. He hates Peter not because of the loss of his arm, but because the boy is so arrogant. This aspect of Peter's personality constantly aggravates Hook and generally disturbs his peace.

We have learned something new and surprising about Hook. We've thought all along that Hook wants to kill Peter to avenge himself for the loss of his arm, or in the spirit of customary hostility between pirates and lost boys. But vengeance is only a cover for Hook's real feeling, a hatred so intense and specific it verges on obsession.

The boys are listening to the sounds of battle, and the pirates are listening to the boys. One boy says that the indians indicate victory by beating the tom-tom, so Smee himself picks up the drum and starts playing. The boys yell happily, say goodbye to Peter, and begin climbing out.

Peter and the other boys expect life on the island to proceed according to a series of simple rules (like the tribe in the section above). Their faith in fairness makes them easy targets for deceit.

CHAPTER 13: DO YOU BELIEVE IN FAIRIES?

Each boy, as he climbs up out of his tree, is captured by a pirate, tied, and gagged. Hook displays the tied-up boys to Wendy "with ironical politeness." Slightly, who is the bulkiest of the boys, is very difficult to tie up, so Hook reasons that Slightly's tree might accommodate a full-grown man.

Hook's manner in this scene is mysterious. He seems to be mocking Wendy's fragility and respectability, and rightly so, for he is a strong and barbaric pirate. But he is a shade too adept at imitating the gentility he scorns.

The pirates put Wendy and the boys in Wendy's cabin and carry the cabin to the ship. When the pirates and their prisoners are out of sight, Hook slides down into the house through Slightly's tree. He finds Peter sleeping peacefully. Peter sometimes has terrible long nightmares related somehow to "the riddle of his existence," but on this night he is sound asleep, and his mouth hangs open to show his pearly teeth. Hook is almost moved to pity by the pretty scene, but as always something arrogant in Peter's appearance enrages him.

Most children have nightmares at one time or another, but these rarely take their terror from existential mystery. Though initially we too are enchanted by Peter's baby teeth and angelic insouciance, we can no longer ignore the brief symptoms of his unchildlike, sad, intelligent inner life. The riddle of his existence troubles us too.


Hook is about to attack, but he finds that he can't undo the latch on Slightly's door to reach Peter. Instead, he puts a very deadly dose of poison in Peter's medicine, which is just within his reach. Then he climbs out of the tree and returns to his ship.

The scene shows just how close Hook's hatred of Peter lies to his love for him. His love is selfless, a door to love of beautiful and innocent things. His hatred is a rebellion against this love.


Soon, Peter is awakened by a tapping on his door. It is Tinker Bell, and she tells Peter that Wendy and the boys have been tied and hauled away. Peter is about to run after them, but first he decides to take his medicine, because he imagines it would have pleased Wendy. Tinker Bell tells Peter it is poisoned: she heard Hook talking to himself about his murderous trick. But Peter doesn't believe her and prepares to drink it anyway.

Peter's anger at Wendy and his affection for her also are close together, but this closeness indicates only the intensity of real friendship. Peter's affectionate gesture cannot be connected to any idea of fairness. It is a sort of penance for his earlier coldness, but a private penance. It's an emotion with no exterior motive.


To save him, Tinker Bell drinks the whole dose. She begins to die right away, and her light grows fainter and fainter. She will only be saved if many children show that they believe in fairies. Peter asks all the children "who are dreaming of Neverland" to clap their hands if they believe. So many clap that Tinker Bell becomes well again.

Peter and Tinker Bell both tend to hide behind stiff and quarrelsome manners. This manner is a sort of armor, and indicates both a distrust of emotions and some prior injury. But in this scene, the two show their love and friendship without reservation.

Now Peter sets out to rescue the others. He has to walk, because flying close enough to the ground to look out for enemies would mean alarming the birds, whom he gave "such strange names that they are very wild and difficult of approach." These birds would tip off the pirates that he is on his way. Peter is alert and excited, and he swears into the darkness: "Hook or me this time."

If Peter named the birds, has he named everything on the island, even the island itself? The name 'Neverland' would certainly make it "wild and difficult of approach." Peter created an island for his home, and gave it a name that meant it never was, and never will be.

CHAPTER 14: THE PIRATE SHIP

Hook's ship, the *Jolly Roger*, emits a small green light as it floats. Smee is sewing, and the other pirates are loafing or playing dice. Hook paces thoughtfully along the ship, thinking of his recent triumph. He is satisfied, but he is not happy: he does not enjoy the company of his crew, who are "socially so inferior." The narrator implies that Hook was formerly quite a famous and upstanding British citizen. He went to an elite school, and its lessons and mannerisms still affect him strongly, especially the idea of "good form."

Pirates have historically been linked to anarchism, a social philosophy whose advocates oppose all forms of authority, including social hierarchies. Pirates are free elements who do not swear allegiance to any government. Pirates and anarchists even have a symbol in common – the black flag. In this context, Hook's obsession with minute social distinctions is sadly comical and suggests that adults can't actually ever escape those social strings enveloping them.

Every day Hook asks himself whether his behavior has shown good form. He is famous, but is fame good form? "Most disquieting question of all, was it not bad form to think about good form?" He questions the course his life has taken, and worries that children do not like him – unlike Smee, who is adored by all children. Hook wonders sadly whether they love Smee for his good form, and droops helplessly onto the floor.

'Good form' is by definition any behavior that is perfectly consistent with current social conventions. Hook's yearning for good form is closely related to Mr. Darling's desire to impress his neighbors. Yet good form is also something mysterious, which rests on a lack of care about good form—it is unconscious, or unselfconscious, the way Peter is. And finally, Hook realizes that his unachievable quest for good form may not even be a quest for the right thing: good form might make a person likable, or impressive, but does it render a person loveable?

The other pirates become disorderly, and Hook recovers his steeliness and orders them angrily to drag the children up to the deck. Hook tells them they are going to walk the plank – all but two, since he needs two cabin boys. When he asks for volunteers, Tootles and the other boys all explain that their mothers would not want them to be pirates. Hook almost enlists John and Michael, but they refuse on grounds of loyalty to the British crown.

Hook is aware that a pirate must not be loyal to any government, and therefore insists that John and Michael must forswear the British empire. Yet he himself is painfully loyal to the British empire. In that, he is not unlike Peter Pan, who escaped ordinary childhood only to recreate it in the heart of his Neverland.

The pirates prepare to drown the boys. They carry Wendy up to deck as well. Wendy is disgusted by the ship's filth, and Hook becomes self-conscious when he catches Wendy staring contemptuously at his dirty clothes. Hook tries to retaliate by demanding that Wendy say some last words to the boys, but Wendy carries it off very gracefully. "I feel that I have a message to you from your real mothers," she says, "and it is this: 'We hope our sons will die like English gentlemen.'" Then she is tied up.

Yet the 'form' in good form is an ancient word that refers to pure being, a quality that precedes all social niceties. It is the promise of ascending beyond 'good form' to simply 'form' that torments Hook. He fears that the neglected rules and rituals of his childhood are the gateways to full being—a being not so shadowed or encumbered by self-consciousness. Wendy, meanwhile, standing in for the lost boys' mothers, ties them to the social expectations of and allegiance to England that both Hook and Peter want to eliminate or escape.

Just as Hook is about to proceed with the execution, he hears the ticking of the **crocodile**. His limbs crumple in terror. He crawls into a corner, and the other pirates prepare to submit to fate. But when the boys look around, they see that it is not the crocodile who is ticking – it is Peter Pan.

The pirates mistake Peter Pan for fate itself—the ticking clock. And he is like fate, a sort of wind that blows through scenes and alters them inexorably. In resembling fate, he ceases to resemble a person: fate is inhuman will.

CHAPTER 15: 'HOOK OR ME THIS TIME'

When Peter had been tiptoeing through the forest, he saw the infamous **crocodile** creep by. When he noticed that it was no longer ticking, he himself began ticking, so that the hungry animals in the forest would become afraid of him and leave him in peace. Hearing the familiar sound, the crocodile followed silently after him. When Peter reached shore and started swimming to the ship he continued to tick, simply because he forgot to stop. Only when he saw the pirates quiet down fearfully did he realize that he was still ticking, and he felt very proud of his accidental cleverness.

Peter's spirit-like, fateful quality is mostly his fearlessness and cleverness. He is like many other heroes, who seem inhuman but are not. Yet his particular form of power does have the quality of the inhuman, because it arises from an impossibility: from the carelessness and loveliness of having lived very little, and the deep sadness and weariness of having lived a long time (the simplest designations of a child and an adult).

By now, Peter has climbed up onto the boat. A pirate passes by him, and Peter kills him quickly. Slightly begins keeping count of the victims. Meanwhile, Peter quietly sneaks into the cabin. The other pirates notice that the ticking has stopped and Hook decides to resume the execution. He sends a pirate down into the cabin to get a "cat," a complicated whip, and in a moment the pirates hear him scream horribly. They also hear a weird crowing sound. One peeks into the cabin and confirms that the pirate is dead. Another pirate dies in the same manner, and a fourth throws himself into the sea.

How can it be that Peter has both lived little and lived long? He has seen life repeat itself in dispiriting cycles almost endlessly, but he has forgotten its particulars: all that's left is the residue, a sadness and toughness of spirit. It makes him an excellent and forgivable murderer. It also makes a person love him (think of his baby teeth) and fear him all at once, just as Hook does.

Now no other pirate is willing to enter the cabin, so Hook himself charges in. He comes out a minute later without his light, and obviously afraid. The other pirates mock him and suspect that the devil is involved. Finally Hook decides to send the children in to fight the mysterious intruder.

This is an interesting moment with regard to Peter's idea of fairness. Peter has no qualms about murdering any number of pirates in the dark, but he spares Hook because the dark gives him an unfair advantage.

As the children enter the cabin, Peter unlocks their chains. Peter and the children then emerge from the cabin quietly. Peter sneaks over to Wendy, unties her, puts on her shawl, and takes her place. Then he crows again. The pirates think that the sound means all the boys have died and they begin to turn against Hook, who is exposing them to such unholy danger. To pacify them, Hook proposes that they drown Wendy, since a woman on a ship is always bad luck.

The supposed lawlessness of the pirate ship mimics the structures and habits of authoritarian nations. When the leader of a country becomes unpopular, and the country is in some sort of deep trouble, the leader will often deflect the people's anger onto an innocent third party – a scapegoat. Here, the scapegoat is Wendy.

He approaches the person in the shawl, who reveals himself to be Peter. In that moment of shock, says the narrator, Hook's "fierce heart broke." Nevertheless, the boys and the pirates begin a bloody battle. In the confusion, most of the pirates are killed or drowned.

Peter is what Hook hates most. The specter of good form is what Hook fears most. If hatred is always a product of fear, then Hook must hate Peter as a pure symbol of good form.

The time has finally come for Peter to battle Hook. Peter is a wonderful swordsman, but Hook also fights excellently. For a while neither can touch the other, but then Peter stabs Hook through the ribs. The sight of his strange blood nauseates Hook and he drops his sword to the ground. Peter graciously invites Hook to pick it back up, and they resume fighting.

Hatred and fear are rejoined in this scene. Peter takes the shapes of a demon, a woman, and fate itself: since Peter is so terribly changeable, Hook begins to feel that good form is everywhere except in him, and anything except him. Hook's self-hatred is embodied in his nausea at his own blood.

Suddenly Hook asks Peter who he is. "I'm youth, I'm joy," Peter answers, and Hook fears that this nonsense is a sign of good form. They fight again, but Hook is overcome with depression. All he wants is to see Peter show bad form. He lights an explosive strong enough to blow up the ship, but Peter simply throws it into the sea. Hook loses himself in memories of his youth, wide playing fields, and dignified clothes.

Peter's is a lovely answer. It feels true on first reading, and so it should: it is, indeed, one part of Peter, the part he himself dreamt up when he first decided to run away and live with the fairies. But let's put him back into context. He is blithely killing left and right. Hook is right: it is nonsense. And yet Peter believes it, and in doing so makes it true, and his unselfconsciousness in believing it is a kind of "good form," at least as Hook sees it. And Hook, in despair, thinks back to his own childhood.

At last, Hook tires of fighting and jumps up onto the side of the ship. Peter is flying at him, and Hook gestures for him to kick instead of striking; Peter grants his wish, and Hook falls into the ocean with the happy feeling that Peter finally showed bad form. The **crocodile** is waiting for Hook in the water. The boys are thrilled by their victories but even more so by "the lateness of the hour." They soon fall asleep in the pirates' beds. Peter, that night, has a very bad nightmare.

Wendy says: "It is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly." Peter is very courteous to Hook at the end. He can be courteous to the man he is about to kill because he does not hate that man or fear him, or feel much of anything at all. He is playing a game and playing it fairly. Perhaps his nightmares are the pains of a conscience that can never quite emerge, or that has been eternally suppressed.

CHAPTER 16: THE RETURN HOME

The next morning, all the boys are dressed as pirates, with Peter as their captain. Peter talks and acts just like Hook, and some of the boys think he intends to become a pirate. Wendy makes him an outfit from Hook's old clothes, and he holds his finger bent like a claw.

Peter's feelings about Hook are morally neutral: he does not stumble over even the smallest trace of guilt when he becomes him. The battle between the boys and the pirates was not a battle of real good against real evil, or complicated person against complicated person. For Peter, it was a game.

Now the narrator jumps to Wendy and her brother's old home. The narrator considers telling the Darlings in advance about the children's return, but he imagines that Mrs. Darling would not want him to spoil the children's surprise. She has kept the children's room ready for them all this time, though perhaps they do not deserve it.

Like Wendy, Mrs. Darling seems permanently suspended on the cusp between childhood and adulthood. On the one hand there is the kiss that never quite disappears, and her utter sympathy with children; on the other hand, her endless love and patience.

Mr. Darling, on his end, has felt responsible for the children's disappearance: he feels they left because he tied up Nana in the yard. Because he is quite a dramatic man, he has decided to live in Nana's kennel until the children return. Nana now lives in the house. Though Mr. Darling is proud and socially conscious, he refuses to leave the kennel; he even goes to work inside it. At first he is something of a laughingstock, but then the neighborhood becomes charmed with his "quixotic" gesture and he becomes famous and beloved.

In the beginning of the story, when the children were still at home, Mr. Darling seemed preoccupied with finances, respectability, and ties. He was focused on surviving and appearing to be adult, and was generally a little tone-deaf when it came to the subtleties of children's feelings. The children's absence seems to have sharpened whatever adulthood had dulled.

Mrs. Darling misses the children very much and always seems sad. The mysterious **kiss** in the corner of her mouth "is almost withered up." The narrator meant to scold her, but he confesses that he loves her best of all the characters in the story. She is sleeping lightly in the nursery, and she dreams that the children are coming back.

If the children's absence has made Mr. Darling more childlike, it seems to have 'withered' the child in Mrs. Darling. Peter Pan can be seen "in the faces of women who have no children," but there is a different sort of child in Mrs. Darling's face, and it comes of having had children.

Mr. Darling comes home. He asks Mrs. Darling to play a song on the piano and to close the window, but she insists that the window must always stay open. He falls asleep, but she continues to play in a little room adjoining the nursery. Just then, Peter and Tinker Bell fly in. Peter has come to shut the nursery window, so that Wendy might feel forgotten and return to Neverland. But when he sees Mrs. Darling cry quietly to herself, he feels uncomfortably as though he can feel her "knocking" inside him, and he opens the window back up.

This moment is parallel in many ways to the moment when Hook descends to the boys' house and watches Peter sleeping. Peter catches Mrs. Darling unawares, just as Hook catches Peter; Peter is almost unwillingly moved by the music and the tears, just as Hook is moved by Peter's pearly teeth. But in Peter, that feeling affects him morally and he does not go through with his plan to make it seem to Wendy and her brothers that their parents have forgotten them.

In a little while the children themselves fly in, slowly remembering their old home. They are surprised to see their father in Nana's kennel. They wonder about Mrs. Darling, but just then she begins to play the piano again, and they sigh with relief. Wendy decides that they should all climb into their beds, so that when she comes in again, everything will look just as it used to.

Peter's callous indifference to Wendy's feelings in the previous scene are the inverse of Wendy's sensitive attention to her mother's feelings. She wants her mother to feel the greatest possible joy at their return (her own joy does not detract from the gesture's thoughtfulness).

When Mrs. Darling comes into the nursery and sees the children in their beds, she thinks she is only dreaming. The children are frightened and call out, but still she thinks she is imagining them. Only when they all run up and hug her does she finally celebrate their homecoming. It is a very happy scene. Peter watches sadly from the windowsill: it is "the one joy from which he must be for ever barred."

We might think that first that Peter is "barred" from this sort of happy familial scene simply because he has no family. But it is not the circumstances that are barred to him, in the quote – it is the joy itself. One must love a person immensely to experience it, and Peter as a selfish, pure child can never feel that kind of love.

CHAPTER 17: WHEN WENDY GREW UP

The lost boys are waiting downstairs. When Mrs. Darling sees them, she resolves to adopt them right away. She wants to adopt Peter too, but he refuses. He will live in Neverland with Tinker Bell. He asks Wendy to come with him, and she almost says yes, but Mrs. Darling reminds Wendy that she needs a mother too. Peter promises to return for Wendy every year so that she can help him with his spring cleaning. Before he flies away he takes Mrs. Darling's **kiss**, "the kiss that had been for no one else."

Peter is violent, callous, and heartless. He is not quite a child, because he has lived so long, and he is not an adult, because he does not have to love another or fear death. But Mrs. Darling's kiss is still for him and him only, for Peter is everything we love about childhood that is not true. His other qualities are only side-effects.

All the boys start going to school and leading ordinary lives. They eventually forget how to fly, because they stop believing in it.

The continuity of daily life and demands of adult life dull our belief in flight – which is literally a leap up from time's horizontal flow.

Peter returns for Wendy the following year, though she is embarrassed that her old Neverland dress is too short. Peter has forgotten about all their old adventures, even about Hook and Tinker Bell. Peter explains that she has probably died, since fairies do not live for very long. Still, Wendy has a wonderful time with him in Neverland.

We are full of memories of people we love, and of places we love in nearly the same way. What would we be otherwise? Imagine a person who has forgotten everyone he has ever loved because he never loved them in any way other than as a child—which is to love in a selfish way. That is Peter Pan.

Peter does not come the next year, and Michael even wonders whether he really exists. He does come the year after that, though he doesn't realize that he skipped a year. He does not come for a long time afterwards, and Wendy grows up and becomes a woman. All the boys become ordinary men, with jobs and beards.

Peter does not forget Wendy quite as quickly as he forgets the others. She was his mother, and she brought into his life a drop of the sort of childhood that does finally turn into adulthood.

Wendy gets married, and soon she has a daughter named Jane. Mrs. Darling is no longer alive. Jane, who now sleeps in the children's old nursery, loves to talk to her mother about Neverland. She asks Wendy why she can no longer fly, and Wendy explains that only "gay, innocent, and heartless" children can fly. Once again, she tells Jane the old story about Peter Pan. When she tries to imitate Peter's crowing, Jane herself crows just like Peter: she has heard the sound in her sleep.

Michael, John, and the lost boys love Peter Pan because they want to be him – to be children forever. But Wendy never wanted to stay a child forever. She wants to grow up, not because she is boring or unimaginative or conventional, but because she is not heartless. She does admire Peter, but in her precocious heart she also pities him. That is perhaps the main reason she agreed to come to Neverland in the first place.

One night, when Wendy is knitting and Jane is asleep, Peter Pan flies in through the window. He hasn't changed at all, and he still has his baby teeth. Wendy is embarrassed to be so grown-up. He thinks it is Michael sleeping in the bed, and he is waiting for Wendy to come and do his spring cleaning. She tells him she can't fly anymore. For once, Peter is afraid. She turns on the light, and runs out of the room.

The drop of real childhood that was Wendy's gift to Peter has never left him. It is the 'knocking' he feels at the sound of Mrs. Darling's tears, and his fear at the sight of Wendy as a grown woman. That pang of loss is a hair's breadth away from love.

When Peter understands that Wendy has grown up, he begins to cry, and his sobs wake Jane. She asks him why he is crying, just as Wendy once asked him, and they become fast friends. When Wendy comes back in, Jane is flying all around the room. Later that night, Jane leaves with Peter to do his spring-cleaning.

But one cannot love someone one does not remember. The closest Peter comes to love is repetition, and so he must love Wendy by loving Jane. Children, like fairies, die young to become adults, but new ones soon replace them.

Wendy becomes old, and now it is Margaret, Jane's daughter, that does Peter's spring cleaning. It will go on forever that way, "so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless."

The fairies at Peter's side replace one other in a never-ending cycle, and the Wendies do too. He comes back for them year after year, flying close to love and away again.

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