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Re-inventing the Origins of the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: Régis Loisel's

Peter Pan

Introduction

Régis Loisel's six-volume comic book series *Peter Pan* (1990-2004), a commercial and critical success in France which was translated into English in 2013, is a striking reformulation of the origins of the mythical character due to its stylistic, narrative and thematic darkness. In Loisel's comic, Peter, who at the start of the series is not yet Peter Pan, lives in a Dickensian Whitechapel (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 64), rather than the Edwardian London setting of the Darlings' home of J.M. Barrie's text and Disney's animated film. His hatred towards adults stems from the abuse to which he is subjected, in particular by his violent and alcoholic mother. Even when Peter flies to Neverland, and eventually becomes Peter Pan, the series does not depart from its darkness. This includes what is arguably the most original diegetic addition to the Peter Pan narrative, in the suggestion that Peter Pan may be Jack the Ripper (an idea which was suggested to Loisel by writer Pierre Dubois, Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 69), whose first victim may be Peter's mother. Loisel's version is, then, clearly a 'Peter Pan for adults', whose erotic aesthetics make it reminiscent of Melinda Gebbie and Alan Moore's subversion of the characters in *Lost Girls* (2006). Laurence Grove also links Loisel's *Peter Pan* with Winshluss' 2008 *Pinocchio* as works of 'fantasy eroticising of [Disney Classics]' (2013: 178).

The adultisation of Peter Pan in Loisel's series has been the focus of the sparse critical attention the series has received so far, mostly from Peter Pan and children's literature scholars. Nathalie Prince points out to what extent it 'contredit l'esprit même du

peterpanisme’ [contradicts the very spirit of Peterpanism], given that Barrie’s text is considered as ‘*le conte pour enfants par excellence*’ [*the ultimate story for children*] (2011: 311).¹ Prince notes however (her discussion of the text influenced by a fidelity discourse from which adaptation studies have productively moved on) that in spite of these apparent ‘transgressions’, Loisel’s re-invention of the origins of Peter Pan can also be read as ‘profoundly faithful’ to the ambiguity and underlying darkness of Barrie’s text, in which Peter Pan’s cruelty is emphasised, and whose narrator describes the story of this boy who would not grow up as ultimately a tragedy (2011: 315-316). This analysis is echoed by Kirsten Stirling, who hails Loisel’s prequel as ‘one of the most intelligent developments of Barrie’s examination of the imagination and of the implications of eternal childhood’ (2012: 66). According to Stirling, the ‘seeds of [Loisel’s] interpretation are arguably to be found in Barrie’, Loisel’s version picking up on clues and testing alternatives already suggested in Barrie, such as the murder of Rose, the proto-Wendy figure in the comic, by Tinkerbell (2012: 78). Stirling’s analysis hints at the productivity of Loisel’s version from an adaptation studies standpoint. That Loisel’s comic book series ‘reveals’ aspects of Barrie’s text can be linked to Perry Nodelman’s idea of children’s literature having adult ‘shadow texts’ (2008), with Loisel emphasising what is left unsaid in Barrie’s text, most notably by turning ‘the boy who hated mothers’, as in one of Barrie’s proposed titles for the play (Stirling 2012: 78), into a potentially matricidal and prostitute-killer traumatised child.

Loisel’s *Peter Pan* is therefore a rich text to explore the complexities of this modern myth, which was famously taken as a case study by Jacqueline Rose (1993) to argue for the impossibility of children’s fiction, and more broadly the child-adult dialectic in children’s literature. In this article I shift the focus to analyse Loisel’s series from the standpoint of comics, and of adaptation studies, using the concept of the network in order to examine Loisel’s *bande dessinée* as a comic prequel to a well-known and multimodal narrative.

Loisel's comics, of course, works as a stand-alone series, but to adapt Linda Hutcheon's claim that although adaptations are 'also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as double- or multilaminated works that they can be theorized *as adaptations*' (2006: 6), I will suggest that it is as a text engaging with, and engaging the reader with, Peter Pan narratives that Loisel's comic series can be theorised *as a prequel*. I first analyse the potential of the medium of comics for textual and visual multiplicities through Loisel's adaptation of core elements of Peter Pan. I examine the ways that Loisel's version takes up, amplifies and transforms cues from the network of textual and visual versions of the Peter Pan narrative. I then draw on Paul Sutton's theorisation of the 'dual temporality' of the prequel to explore the reading process of Loisel's *Peter Pan* as a comic prequel, focusing on the nature of a comic as a network. The formal specificities of the medium are used to engage the reader in the de- and re-construction of the origins of the mythical, citable, iterable and multimodal character of Peter Pan in comic book form.

Contextualising Loisel's prequel in the network of Peter Pan narratives

The prequel as a genre has received very little critical attention, and is, as Stirling points out, 'generally subsumed in discussions of the sequel' (2012: 69). Prequels and sequels belong, as adaptations, to the broader category of intertextualities and textual multiplicities. They are, as Hutcheon points out, 'not really adaptations', because 'there is a difference between never wanting a story to end [...] and wanting the retell the same story over and over in different ways' (2006: 9). However, serialisations involve a certain degree of adaptation. They are found in the ninth and penultimate category in Thomas Leitch's taxonomy of adaptive strategies, which goes from 'celebration' to 'allusion' in an attempt to demarcate the place where adaptation, hypertextual relations, shades off into allusion, the intertextual (2009: 94-

95).² On the continuum between adaptation and allusion, serialisations belong to the ‘troublesome category’ of ‘*secondary, tertiary, or quaternary adaptations*’. They are defined as ‘adaptations not of an earlier story, but of an earlier character, setting, or concept’ (2009: 120), aspects which can be described as ‘core elements’, using Eckart Voigts-Virchow’s terminology in his study of serialisations of the character of Alice (2013: 70). These core elements, which are citable and recognisable, function as ‘anchors that keep the unfolding narratives “rooted” to a semantic or narrative basis’ (Voigts-Virchow 2013: 67). The core elements of Peter Pan include characters, such as Peter Pan himself as the figure of the eternal boy, Tinkerbell, Captain Hook, the Lost Boys, and the Darling children; and the two spaces of London and Neverland. In order to explore how core elements are adapted in Loisel’s comic, it is first important to contextualise Loisel’s version as part of the network of textual and visual Peter Pan narratives.

The most significant version of Peter Pan with regard to Loisel’s *bande dessinée* is the 1953 Disney animated film. Loisel first saw the film aged thirteen, and while the image of Peter Pan flying left a mark on him, it is not until he watched it again with his son in 1978 that he started to ponder, ‘as an adult’, over the question of the origins of the character. It is then from 1985 onwards that he immersed himself in his work on the genesis of Peter Pan (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 64). It is therefore an adaptation that triggered Loisel’s interest in the character, and the importance of the Disney animated film in the visualisation of Peter Pan is also mentioned by Loisel in relation to the readers of his comics, many of whom, according to him, thought that the characters had been invented by Disney (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 78). By contrast, in a British context it is more likely that Peter Pan would (also, or primarily) be known through Barrie’s novel, or representations of the play. In this sense, in the French context of Loisel’s comics, we see an example of the ‘inverse’ influence of the adaptation on the source text that exemplifies the ‘reciprocally transformative model of

adaptation' between adaptation and source text as analysed by Kamilla Elliott (2003: 229). There is a similar process with regard to Frankenstein's monster as examined by Pedro Javier Pardo García, who notes that most film versions take previous cinematic adaptations rather than the source text as a point of departure, to the extent that Mary Shelley's novel 'has become one more version of that myth – the founding, but not necessarily the most influential one' (2005: 224). In this regard, it is interesting to point out that when Loisel eventually read Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter and Wendy*, he admits that he was disappointed with it, having read it looking for 'anecdotes' that would not be found in the Disney version and that he could connect to his re-construction of the origins of the character (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 64).³

While the Disney animated film is arguably the best-known version of the Peter Pan narrative, there are numerous iterations of the character and his story across media. This can be explained by the status of the character as a 'modern myth' that has 'dissociated itself from its time' (Muñoz Corcuera and Di Biase 2012: x) to become part of collective imagination. As such, 'Peter Pan' is part of bodies of texts and source material described by Julie Sanders as 'communal, shared, transcultural',⁴ and therefore 'particularly rich sources for adaptation and appropriation' (2006: 45). Examples of adaptations and serialisations of Peter Pan include Robbins' 1954 Broadway musical, which was then re-staged for television; in literature, McCaugrean's 'official sequel' *Peter Pan in Scarlet* (2006), and Barry and Pearson's prequel *Peter and the Starcatchers* (2004), which was then adapted to the stage (Elice 2009); or in film, Brenon's 1924 *Peter Pan* and Spielberg's 2004 sequel *Hook*. Moreover, Barrie's texts have been illustrated by many different artists since the first editions of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906) and *Peter and Wendy* (1911), illustrated by Arthur Rackham and F.D. Bedford respectively, for instance by G.M Hudson (*Peter and Wendy*, 1931) and Gustafson (*Peter Pan*, 1991). Illustration can be described as 'une adaptation partielle, ou plus exactement fragmentaire' [a partial, or, more precisely,

fragmentary adaptation] (2005: 30), in which artists offer their visual interpretation of aspects of the text, which, in turn, inherently shapes the reader's visualisation of the text.

The numerous iterations of Peter Pan across media can be described as forming an 'aggregate Peter Pan', to adapt Voigts-Virchow's term 'aggregate Alice' (2007: 67). I suggest that it is productive to think of this aggregate of texts, including Barrie's, as a network, as the versions, rewritings and interpretations of the character and his story are connected and interconnected in a network of meanings, associations, relations, or representations. I am using the concept of the network following Sanders, who argues that in order to explore the proliferation of connections and interconnections in adaptations and appropriations of Shakespearean drama, 'we need, perhaps, to think less in terms of lines of influence and more in terms of webs or networks of allusion and (mutual) influence' (2006: 152). Of course, each text in the 'Peter Pan network' is itself connected to other texts, as part of an 'ever-expanding network of textual relations' (Sanders 2006: 3).

Loisel's *Peter Pan* is therefore part of this network, and connected to other Peter Pan narratives, whether this was intended by Loisel or not. Indeed, as Sanders points, drawing on Barthes, texts are connected to other texts also by readers 'who [create] their own intertextual networks' (2006: 2). The adultisation of Peter Pan, soft-porn aesthetics, and the nature of Loisel's version as a comic invoke Gebbie and Moore's *Lost Girls*, which was published after Loisel's comics but with which an Anglophone reader is likely to be familiar prior to reading Loisel. The fact that in Loisel's rewriting Hook is Peter's father echoes the casting in the 1904 production of the same actor (Du Maurier) as Mr. Darling and Captain Hook, and therefore as the father and the pirate, which 'has had an important impact on contemporary readings of the play' (Tuite 2009: 110), in particular with regard to interpretations of their confrontation as Oedipal struggle. Loisel's *Peter Pan*, as a comic, is both verbal and visual, in this way invoking the multimodality of Peter Pan as a textual and graphic character, whose

iterations across media have extended its inherent multimodality as a character from a novel (*The Little White Bird*, 1902), then a play (*Peter Pan; Or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*, 1904), and a novel (*Peter and Wendy*, 1911), but which was also crucially visual due to the inclusion of Rackham's and F.D. Bedford's illustrations in the first editions of *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* and *Peter and Wendy*. Loisel's *Peter Pan* is, then, the adaptation of a multimodal character in a multimodal medium. This enables us to explore the use of comics as an adaptive medium, one of whose specificities lies in its hybridity and multimodality as a verbal and visual medium. Robert Stam argues in his 'new view' of adaptation, moving beyond concerns of fidelity, that

the source text is seen as a dense network of verbal cues which the adapting film text can then selectively take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform according to the protocols of a distinct medium, and as mediated by a series of filters. (2012-2013: 180)

Loisel's version, in its adaptation of core elements, draws on both verbal and visual clues, due to the multimodality of the Peter Pan network, and the hybridity of the medium.

Adapting core elements of Peter Pan into comics

The most striking aspect of Loisel's adaptation of the central character, Peter Pan, is that he is split into two entities until the fourth volume *Mains Rouges* (1996), in which Peter becomes Peter Pan after Pan's death. Loisel's Pan has the features of the Greek god, with the hindquarters, legs and horns of a goat, but with noticeably childish features and size that make him resemble Peter. For his representation of a split Peter / Pan, Loisel took the word Pan in the name of the character as a starting point, and noted that in the Disney film the reference to Pan was visually present through Peter Pan's pointy ears and flute (Pissavy-

Yvernault 2006: 65). In this regard, Loisel's comic takes up and adapts a verbal (the name Pan) and visual (Disney's representation) cue of the network of texts to which it is connected. Moreover, Loisel's comic overtly references one of the intertextual sources of Barrie's text, namely Greek mythology. Muñoz Corcuera and Di Biase point out that in Barrie's text the Greek god Pan 'lends Peter his name and many of his features' (2012: ix), and Loisel's version amplifies this intertextual allusion by staging the actual 'fusion' (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 65) between Peter and Pan. Significantly, Loisel's comic also presents us with a 'pre-Peter Pan' Peter who is a reader of Greek mythology, as his father's copy of Homer's *The Odyssey* is given to him by his friend Mr Kundall (1990a: 28). As a prequel, Loisel's comic shows us a pre-mythical Peter, and it can be argued that the reference to mythology works not only as an allusion to the mythical sources of the character, but also to his status as a modern myth, constructed in reception since its creation by Barrie, through a process of 'mythologizing' to which the worldwide success of the Disney film, itself of course an important visual intertext for Loisel, contributed greatly (Muñoz Corcuera and Di Biase 2012: xii).

Loisel's representation of Peter / Pan epitomises his approach to the adaptation of core elements of the narrative, in the sense that it takes up and amplifies verbal and visual clues from the intertexts, while being an appropriation of the character. It contrasts with, yet echoes previous representations. Loisel explains that he '[voulait] que l'aspect graphique de [ses] personnages soit nouveau tout en leur conférant une impression de déjà-vu' [wanted the graphic aspect of [his] characters to be new, while at the same invoking a sense of déjà-vu]; specifically, his representation of the characters had to match their visualisation in '[l'] imagerie populaire' [popular imagery] (shaped by the Disney film in particular) as well as the 'vrais personnages créés par Barrie' [original characters created by Barrie] (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 78). The core elements that are the characters must be recognisable for the

readers to identify the comic as a Peter Pan narrative, and to engage in the interplay between repetition and difference and the mnemonic toing and froing between versions that is constitutive of the palimpsestuous pleasure of adaptation as analysed by Hutcheon (2006: 116), provoking ‘juxtaposed readings’ in Sanders’ words (2006: 25).

For instance, Loisel describes his version of Captain Hook, another core element of the Peter Pan narrative, as ‘un entre-deux entre la description de Barrie et son interprétation par Disney, auquel [Loisel a] rajouté un côté Raspoutine, avec un regard de braise et un visage émacié’ [in between Barrie’s description and his interpretation by Disney, to which Loisel added an element of Raspoutine, with a fiery look and an emaciated face] (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 78). Loisel’s description shows that he aimed to create a version of Captain Hook that would invoke Barrie’s and Disney’s as the two most influential texts in the Peter Pan network, while also being his own appropriation of the character. This is seen for instance with regard to the character’s frock coat in Loisel’s version: Loisel used a WW1 frock coat as a model (therefore including an element of chronological impossibility), but changed its original colour to match, and therefore allude to, the 18th-century-inspired outfit of Captain Hook in the Disney film (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 78).

The most iconic of Loisel’s characters is arguably Tinkerbell, to the extent that in France she has become a ‘référence graphique’ [graphic reference] as put by Pissavy-Yvernault (2006: 79). As with other characters, Loisel aimed to create a Tinkerbell that would be both recognisable and new. He explains that unlike previous visual artists in whose work the fairy did not hold an important role (apart from in Disney’s and Spielberg’s films), he ‘exploited’ the graphic, and specifically erotic, potential of Tinkerbell he perceived from Barrie’s description of her in the novel. Moreover, Loisel’s highly sexualised Tinkerbell was also inspired by a specific scene in the Disney animated film, in which she looks at herself in the mirror and seems to worry about the size of her behind and hips (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006:

78-79). This scene, which is the first time she appears in the film, establishes her, as Ohmer points out, as ‘exaggeratedly feminine’, in line with Disney’s aim to make her ‘more explicitly sexual’ (2009: 175). Loisel’s version amplifies the verbal and visual cues of Tinkerbell’s appearance, and in particular her sexualisation by Disney, but to turn her into a scantily-clad, sexualised fairy whose physical ‘imperfectness’ ultimately starkly contrasts with Disney’s (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 78-79). Loisel’s Tinkerbell also echoes his erotic work, and more generally the sexualisation of female characters by male artists in *bande dessinée* (about this see Le Duc 2005). It is connected to texts outside Peter Pan narratives as a personal, creative and interpretive, historically-situated version that is part of an author’s *oeuvre*, and is shaped by conventions and trends specific to its medium.

Comic art is a verbal and visual medium, and Loisel’s adaptation of elements of the Peter Pan narrative does not only lie in his graphic representation of the characters. The re-utterance of one of the names of the island in French translation, *Pays* or *Ile de Jamais-Jamais*, is particularly interesting with regard to the verbal reinterpretation of verbal elements. The island is never named in Loisel’s version, but the comic alludes to, cites and re-contextualises, its French name of *Jamais-Jamais*. ‘Jamais / jamais’ is first uttered by Peter in the first volume, before he meets Tinkerbell and flies to the island. Peter, whom his mother sent to buy a bottle of brandy without giving him money, is forced to pull his trousers down and show his penis to the drunken adults in the tavern in order to obtain the bottle. Following this scene of abuse, Peter meets his friend Mr Kundall (who saw everything but did not intervene), and during their conversation angrily shouts ‘Je ne veux pas grandir! Jamais! Jamais!’ [I don’t want to grow up! Never! Never!] (1990a: 25). ‘Jamais! Jamais!’ is in bold, and this emphasis may contribute to raising the memory of the island’s name in the French reader’s mind. ‘Jamais-jamais’ alludes to the familiar concept of Peter Pan as an

eternal boy who refuses to grow up, but here it is linked to an episode of abuse by adults, significantly darkening the reasons behind Peter's eternal youth.

The second time that 'Jamais / jamais' is uttered by Peter is in a highly disturbing scene in the second volume. Peter is in Opikanoba, a place feared by all the inhabitants of the island in which people hallucinate their deepest fears. Peter is confronted with a hallucination of his abusive mother, to which he yells 'Tu ne m'as jamais aimé! Jamais! Ja...' [You have never loved me! Never! Ne...] (1990b: 41), before eviscerating her. 'Jamais / jamais' may here be connected in the reader's mind to its first utterance, becoming a refrain representing Peter's hatred of adults. Its re-utterance amplifies the re-contextualisation of *Jamais-Jamais* as part of a story of abuse and trauma. A citable element of the Peter Pan narrative (here, one of the names of the island in French translation) is iterated in the Derridean sense, re-uttered in a new context of graphic violence and narrative and thematic darkness. A similar process is seen in the last volume, *Destins*, when Picou, a child traumatised by the murder of his sister Rose (who serves as a proto-Wendy) by Tinkerbell, is described by the centaur Pholus as a 'lost child' ('cet enfant s'est perdu', 'this child has lost himself') (2004: 32). This allusion to the 'Lost Boys' (usually translated as 'Enfants perdus' in French) of the Peter Pan narrative amplifies its underlying darkness, by juxtaposing a verbal allusion to a well-known core element, with the image of an expressionless, traumatised child with bulging eyes. These examples show how the series exploits the potential of comics as an adaptive medium, as core elements of the textual and visual Peter Pan narrative are re-uttered and reinterpreted. Loisel's *bande dessinée* engages with and re-formulates Peter Pan's textual and visual multiplicities as an iterable and multimodal myth, the reader recognising adapted core elements, in a dynamic of repetition and difference.

The comic prequel

In order to examine how Loisel's *Peter Pan* engages the reader with its re-formulation of the Peter Pan narrative, it is important to reflect further on the specificities of the reading process of the comic *as a prequel*. I will argue that Loisel's *bande dessinée* productively uses the nature of a comic as a network, as it has been theorised by Groensteen (2013), to engage the reader in the re-construction of the origins of Peter Pan. In order to understand the specific reading or viewing process that the prequel provokes, it is useful to draw on Leitch's argument about the 'distinctiveness' of adaptation in the wider intertextual field. According to Leitch, adaptation 'foregrounds the possibility [of testing assumptions formed by earlier experiences of texts against a new set of norms and values] and makes it more active, more exigent, more indispensable' (2008: 117). The palimpsestuous pleasure of experiencing an adaptation lies in the recognition of repetition and difference, which is also part of the pleasure of Loisel's reader in seeing core elements adapted. The specificity of the active reading process of the prequel within the broader intertextual field lies, I suggest, in its nature as both a retrospective and prospective, anticipatory reading, which derives from its complex temporality.

Stirling's chapter on Loisel's *bande dessinée* is entitled 'Before *Peter Pan*', in reference to its status as a prequel. However Loisel's comic does not only indeed come before, but also after, *Peter Pan*. Voigts-Virchow points out that 'serialization is, by nature, temporal in the sense that a narrative is extended into a future (sequel) or a previously unwritten past (prequel)' (2010: 67). Yet the prequel offers a more complex temporality than the sequel, namely a 'dual temporality', as theorised by Paul Sutton with regard to cinema. Sutton argues that the film prequel 'possesses a particular dual temporality that enables it to both precede and follow the film or films to which it is a prequel' (2010: 141-142). In order to explore the dual temporality of the film prequel, Sutton uses the psychoanalytical concepts

of *Nachträglichkeit* and ‘afterwardsness’, through which memory is understood as ‘always a retrospective construction that is produced by deferred action, afterward’ (2010: 146). The Freudian term *Nachträglichkeit* denotes the way that an event becomes traumatic afterward, once it is remembered *as* traumatic. *Nachträglichkeit* was then translated and developed by Jean Laplanche as ‘afterwardsness’, which refers to the re-translation of past, un-translated signifiers into new contexts (2010: 144-145). According to Sutton, the film prequel is structured by the logic of ‘afterwardsness’, in the sense that the events that are watched are understood retrospectively, given that they are read in the light of subsequent events (the film which the prequel follows, and whose unwritten past it is re-constructing).

This is productive with regard to Loisel’s *Peter Pan*. Upon reading Loisel’s comic, the most enigmatic signifier of the Peter Pan narrative, namely Peter Pan’s eternal childhood, is retrospectively understood as part of a narrative of trauma. Scenes of abuse are read *as* traumatic by the reader due to her/his additional knowledge of Peter Pan’s eternal childhood, the result of his subsequent staunch refusal to become a ‘sale adulte’ [dirty adult], an expression frequently repeated by Loisel’s Peter. The (structurally and narratively) past events are read retrospectively, and already recognised *as* traumatic. The aforementioned re-contextualisation of *Jamais-Jamais* is an example of this process.

Due to the dual temporality of the prequel and therefore the reader’s knowledge of what both precedes, and follows in narrative terms, the reading process is however not only retrospective, but also prospective and anticipatory. The comics appropriation and re-formulation of the origins of Peter Pan, or rather of the boy Peter who would one day become Peter Pan, entails a process of de- and re-construction of the character and his universe, in which the reader takes an active part.

In order to understand precisely how this is achieved in Loisel’s comic, it is useful to contrast the reading process of a comic prequel with the viewing process of a film prequel.

Sutton argues that the significance of the film prequel lies in the way that it is ‘the effect, in a cinematic context, of “afterwardsness” itself’ (2010: 148). He posits the ‘absolute centrality of memory to cinema’ (2010: 147), and, using the prequel to reflect more broadly on the viewing process of film, suggests a spectatorial paradigm that understands spectatorship as active and reconstructive, in the way that spectators retrospectively understand a film in narrative terms, reordering the visual and aural stimuli to which they have been subjected. The centrality of memory to film, which is the core of Sutton’s analysis, is used by Groensteen to draw a contrast between film, a medium whose viewing process (in a cinematic context) is necessarily monovectorised, in the sense that filmic images are fugitive; and comic art, a medium whose reading process allows for not only linear but also translinear and plurivectoral reading (2007: 155). Indeed, as Groensteen points out, in a comic ‘every panel exists, potentially if not actually, in relation with each of the others’ (2007: 146). Due to the nature of a comic as a network whose images are not fugitive, the active, retrospective and prospective reading process of the comic prequel is therefore inherently different from the viewing process of the film prequel.

Reading Loisel’s prequel as a network

Significantly, in Loisel’s *Peter Pan* the engagement of the reader with the complex interplay between ‘before’ and ‘after’ is achieved in ways that exploit the formal specificities of the medium of comics. This is seen for instance with regard to Captain Hook, a core element of the Peter Pan narrative that in Loisel’s comic first appears at the end of volume one with two hands as a pre-Hook Captain. Peter Pan only cuts off his hand in the fourth volume, and the Captain puts on the hook in the fifth, *Crochet* (2002b). This narrative development is expected by the reader from the first appearance of the character, recognised *as* Captain

Hook. This prospective aspect of the reading process of Loisel's prequel is played upon in two panels on p. 28 of the third volume, *Tempête* (2002a). The Captain has just insulted the mermaid Poteline out of anger and impatience, and the fourth panel on the page, which takes up the whole width of the multiframe, is a close-up on the Captain's face and his two hands, raised in a pleading gesture, as he apologises for his rashness. The bottom five panels on the page are narrow and tall, and the third one in the strip, which features a hook on a rope, is placed below the centre of the panel featuring the close-up on the Captain's face and hands. The spatial arrangement of the panels on the page incites the reader to read them in a plurivectoral way, synchronically following the narrative progression, and by linking two panels in her/his prospective and anticipatory reading. This allusion to what the reader knows is to come actively invites, and foregrounds the productivity of, plurivectoral reading in the comic prequel.

The anticipation of the re-construction of a core element is of course particularly important with regard to Peter Pan. It is only at the end of the first volume that the character of Pan appears, and it is not until the fourth that Peter becomes Peter Pan, following the death of Pan, a character '[dont Loisel] devait [se] débarrasser, puisqu'il n'existe pas dans le roman de Barrie' [which Loisel had to get rid of, because he does not feature in Barrie's novel] (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 65). In *Mains rouges*, a seriously distraught Peter, who feels responsible for his friend's death, carves both their names into wood, foreshadowing their fusion. The carving is first seen, incomplete, in close-up on p. 10; and then, incomplete again and split into 'Pan' and 'Peter', in two panels featuring a conversation between Pholus and Tinkerbell on p. 14. The fragmented repetition of this carving, an inherent text/image interface according to Cohn's terminology (2013: 35), may be considered as an example of weaving. The significance of this recurring motif is to allude to what the reader knows will happen, namely the fusion of Peter and Pan into one character. The carving is seen again on

the page where Peter finally proclaims his new name (1996: 44). The names Peter and Pan are, again, split between two panels of similar size and shape, which are each second in their respective strip, but not exactly vertically aligned. The names in these two panels reflect each other, inciting a diagonal reading on the part of the reader. The recurrence of the carved names until the moment when Peter becomes Peter Pan provokes the reader into linking up fragments of panels to the broader narrative. Allusions are picked up on more actively due to the nature of the series as a prequel, in which the reader is arguably looking for allusions and clues in her/his active, anticipatory, and here translinear, reading.

As we have seen, one significant difference between filmic and comic images is that the latter are not fugitive, but read in context. As Ann Miller points out, ‘where the filmic image enters into a spatial relationship only with the off-screen space cut off by the frame, the *bande dessinée* image will always be perceived simultaneously with other images’ (2007: 83), surrounded by its ‘perifield’ in Peeters’ term (1991: 15). In this regard, we can contrast the inherent ‘afterwardsness’ of film with the ‘beforeness’ of the double page in comics, as the reader’s eye takes in the double page not only before, but also while reading sequentially. Scott McCloud analyses this specificity of the medium in terms of temporality. When reading a comic ‘the past is more than just memories for the audience and the future is more than just possibilities’, given that ‘both past and present are real and visible all around us’ (1993: 104). This is fruitful with regard to the complex temporality of the comic prequel, in which aspects of the ‘future’ are anticipated by the reader, namely the introduction and reconstruction of core elements.

The double page of the first meeting between Tinkerbell and Peter (1990a: 38-39), when she comes to London to bring him to the island as the saviour, is interesting in this regard. Tinkerbell appears as what Peter thinks is a shooting star on the left-hand page, and on the right-hand page as a fairy whose physical appearance, as analysed earlier, both echoes,

and contrasts with Disney's. The reader, unlike Peter, already knows that Tinkerbell is not a shooting star, but a recognisable core element of the Peter Pan narrative. The anticipatory pleasure of the reading process, and the reading of this scene *as* the introduction of a core element, is combined with the fact that the reader's eye is already taking in the double page before and while reading sequentially, her/his eye also arguably drawn by the light which Tinkerbell brings to the panels on the right-hand page.

As Tinkerbell's first appearance, this scene marks the start of the narrative evolution towards a more familiar Peter Pan narrative, and this is highlighted by the relationship between two spatially distant panels on the double page. While the two panels do not have the same size or shape, their position on the double page enables a diagonal reading from the bottom-left corner of the left-hand page, to the top-right corner of the right-hand page. The first panel features Peter, turned to the right, in the dark as the scene is set at night, dressed in rags and with an expression of shock and confusion on his face. The second panel shows him, now turned to the left, smiling, with Tinkerbell holding onto his hood and bringing light to his face. A diagonal reading of these two panels shows the start of the gradual evolution of a 'Gavroche-like' Peter (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 82), who so far contrasted so vividly with the reader's image of the character, into the Peter Pan that s/he knows.

In this example the importance of the double page is linked to the gradual introduction of familiar elements. In another case, early on in the first volume (1990a: 14-15), an element of the Peter Pan narrative is not only alluded to, but also re-contextualised by its periphery. The tavern in Peter's neighbourhood is called 'Mermaid Tavern', an allusion to the mermaids that inhabit the island. Stirling points out that the fact that the tavern is the 'nexus of all threatening sexuality' shows the 'rather troubling origins' of the sexualised mermaids which Peter will encounter on the island (2012: 71), and this is productively staged on the double page. The allusion to the mermaids is placed as a clue to be picked up by the reader actively

re-constructing the Peter Pan narrative, in a panel situated in the centre of the left-hand page, taking the whole width of the multiframe. It prominently features the ‘Mermaid Tavern’ sign and its drawing of a mermaid, juxtaposed with adults’ hostile comments about Peter and Mr Kundall’s relationship, in speech bubbles taking up the right half of the panel. The image of the mermaid invokes the *merveilleux* environment of the island, the visualisation of which in the reader’s mind is shaped by the Disney film. It is however surrounded by its periphery, and Peter’s current environment, with the majority of the panels on the double page featuring drunken, grotesque and menacing adults, whose hostility towards Peter even invades the panel with the mermaid sign, by means of the speech bubbles.

This example shows that while the reading process is prospective with regard to core elements, part of the pleasure of the reader lies in their re-contextualisation, in the interplay between recognition (Loisel’s ‘déjà-vu’) and difference. This is clear in the second album, which is set on the island, an environment more readily associated with the Peter Pan narrative than the Dickensian Whitechapel of the first volume. On the island, represented with bright colours that contrast with the browns of London, the reader recognises pirates, mermaids, and creatures from folklore (with the notable addition of korriganes from Breton folklore). However, Loisel’s version of the island includes the territory of Opikanoba, in which the aforementioned scene of Peter’s confrontation with the hallucination of his mother (1990b: 39-42) takes place. This scene is crucial due to its connections to preceding and forthcoming events in the *bande dessinée* as a serial network, and to the network of Peter Pan narratives.

In this scene, Peter’s mother first appears to him as the idealised mother he does not have, and when Peter talks to her about ‘caresses’ and ‘honey-flavoured kisses’, this references the story he told his orphaned friends (the future Lost Boys) at the beginning of the first volume (1990a: 9-10). In Opikanoba however she soon turns into a nightmarish,

monstrous version of his mother, who gives birth to a baby which she castrates with fang-looking teeth. The format of the medium arguably increases the impact of this scene. Due to the non-fugitiveness of the comic images, blood, which is present in seven of the ten panels on the left-hand page, is always in the corner of the reader's eye. The mother's bright orange hair also contributes to giving the impression of the prominence of blood on the page. Moreover, the iteration of the mother's face on the double page, and its transformation into a distorted and monstrous face to the extent that it barely looks human in the penultimate panel on the right-hand page, contributes to the 'graphic shock' of the scene. This unexpected scene, in a territory that is unexpected on the island from the reader's memories of the Peter Pan narrative, sheds a new light on the extent of Peter Pan's trauma and hatred of mothers. While it so departs from the familiar aesthetics, themes and narrative of well-known Peter Pan narratives, it can however also be read as the interpretation of a verbal cue from Barrie's novel, about Peter Pan's nightmares:

Sometimes, though not often, [Peter Pan] had dreams, and they were more painful than the dreams of the 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. (2004: 110)

In Loisel's version, the Opikanoba scene indeed has to do with the 'riddle' of Peter Pan's existence as the figure of the traumatised eternal-boy who vows never to grow up and become a 'dirty adult'. Significantly, his own origins and his trauma remain a riddle for Peter, as he, because he lives on the island, forgets the confrontation with his mother. Loisel represents the island as a space created by children's imagination, but from nightmare and trauma as much as dream.

The last page in this scene is interesting in the way that it is connected to the possibility that Peter Pan may be Jack the Ripper, another stark departure from Barrie's and

Disney's Peter, connected to Pierre Dubois's version of Peter Pan as Jack the Ripper in *Les Contes du crime* (2009). As Peter rebels against his mother, he grabs a knife, stabs, and eviscerates her. This panel will be invoked in the following volume, when Peter visits his real mother, whom he finds in bed with a doctor called Jack. After both Peter and the doctor have left the house, we see a panel featuring Peter's stabbed mother on the floor (2002a: 61). We significantly do not see Peter stabbing his mother in London, but we saw him stabbing her, 'ripping' her open, in Opikanoba. The reader, retroactively determining the significance of the Opikanoba episode, chooses to connect the two panels according to her/his interpretation of the murder, which happens 'off-frame', behind a closed door (2002a: 59). The Opikanoba episode is therefore pivotal in Loisel's *Peter Pan* as a *bande dessinée* prequel. The formal specificities of the medium are exploited to increase the graphic impact of a scene that may be read as the dark amplification of a verbal clue from the source text, in the creation of a nightmarish space within the island. Moreover, in relation to the Jack the Ripper storyline, it foregrounds the openness of the reader's interpretation in the connections s/he makes between panels in this re-imagining of the myth of Peter Pan.

Conclusion

Loisel's *Peter Pan* is a powerful case study to explore the potential of comic art as an adaptive medium, and the significance of the prequel for the reading process of comics. These two aspects are productively linked by the concept of the network, which brings adaptation, and comics studies into critical dialogue in the examination of Loisel's *bande dessinée* as being not only connected to the network of Peter Pan narratives, but also as functioning as a network itself. The prequel uses the formal specificities of comics to engage with, and engage its readers with, the complex interplay between 'before' and 'after' as well

as the visual and textual multiplicities of Peter Pan, as a multimodal character that is recognisable and available for citation, iteration, and multiplication. The hybrid medium is exploited to adapt core elements of this modern myth in a *bande dessinée* that provokes translinear, plurivectoral and open readings. The reading process of the prequel is active, retrospective, prospective and anticipatory, in a dynamic of repetition and difference, adding engaging pleasure to the de- and re-construction of the mythical figure of Peter Pan.

While Loisel only tells the genesis of Peter Pan as ‘le reste de [la vie du personnage] ne [lui] appartient pas’ [the rest of the character’s life does not belong to him] (Pissavy-Yvernault 2006: 153), the resonance of his re-invention of the origins of Peter Pan has been such that, in France, there is now a ‘Loisel Peter Pan’ alongside Disney Peter Pan in visual culture. At the end of the last volume, Jack the Ripper has committed his last murder, and Peter Pan is now established as the leader of the Lost Boys, whom, he has seen, benefit from the motherly presence of a young Londoner girl; he is also the nemesis of Captain Hook, who is terrified of a ticking crocodile. The last double page of the series includes an authorial intrusion, with a photograph of Loisel’s desk in the gutter of the left-hand page, and taking over the right-hand page, with a note addressed to Peter Pan and telling him ‘je te laisse poursuivre ton chemin... seul’ [I leave you to continue on your path... Alone] (2004: 50-51). We leave Peter Pan to ‘continue on his path’, and live the well-known narratively and structurally subsequent events. Peter Pan has forgotten where he comes from, but as Loisel’s version is now part of his readers’ own intertextual networks, they may be left to (re-)read Barrie’s novel, (re)watch the Disney film, and understand Peter Pan, differently.

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¹ All translations from the French are my own.

² Leitch uses this exercise in taxonomy, which he describes as ultimately 'failed', to show the porosity of apparently categorical distinctions in the study of adaptation, for which there can ultimately be 'no normative model' given that it must be understood as part of the wider field of intertextualities (2009: 126). Leitch points out however that this classification is useful to distinguish between different adaptive strategies.

³ It is not clear whether Loisel has read Barrie's *The Little White Bird* (1902) or *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906), which include details on the origins of the character of Peter Pan, albeit an earlier version of him as a much younger boy.

⁴ Sanders' description includes 'transhistorical', and the fact that Peter Pan, who was created over one hundred years ago, as White and Tarr point out, 'emerges periodically in every generation to renewed impact' supports their claim that 'Peter Pan is immortal' (2006: vii),

which is echoed by Muñoz Corcuera and Di Biase's prediction that Peter Pan 'will accompany our culture for as long as it survives' (2012: xix).