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# The Girls Who Had to Grow Up: Reflections on Motherhood and Dual Identity in Lewis Carroll's Wonderland and J.M. Barrie's Neverland

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THE GIRLS WHO HAD TO GROW UP:  
REFLECTIONS ON MOTHERHOOD AND DUAL IDENTITY  
IN LEWIS CARROLL'S WONDERLAND AND J.M. BARRIE'S NEVERLAND

A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of English  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

By  
Theresa JoAnn FitzPatrick

May 2008



**THE GIRLS WHO HAD TO GROW UP:  
REFLECTIONS ON MOTHERHOOD AND DUAL IDENTITY  
IN LEWIS CARROLL'S WONDERLAND AND J.M. BARRIE'S NEVERLAND**

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Theresa JoAnn FitzPatrick

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My thesis explores the world of the “imaginary” in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* and its connection to the world of the “mundane” experienced by the typical Victorian housewife and mother. Both are intimately connected within the texts, primarily in the characters’ dual roles as dictated by the gendered expectations of Victorian society. While in the imaginary world, both Alice and Wendy experience mini-versions of their future lives. They exist as girl and mother simultaneously. Carroll, by creating a hostile environment, grotesque mother-images, and a confused, argumentative Alice, shows a negative portrait of motherhood, since he never wanted little girls to become women. In contrast, Barrie depicts motherhood as sacred, something to be desired and protected at all costs. By necessity, maternal ideology is connected to female sexuality but is far superior in value. Both authors created an escape from the mundane realities of Victorian life wherein the audience could contemplate its societal roles. Barrie’s story elevates mothers and their connection to eternal childhood, and Carroll’s elevates girlhood, questioning the absurdities of “grown-up” reality.

I also explore the dual nature of the secondary characters, analyzing the females against the Victorian Madonna/harlot dichotomy. For example, Tinker Bell, the

working-class, profane fairy to Wendy's middle-class angel, is allowed much more freedom of expression and power to control her life than Wendy, though this freedom comes with a price. Primarily, she seeks Peter's company and attention, but she must settle for second place when Wendy is around. Mrs. Darling, the representation of angelic motherhood, is Barrie's professed "favorite" character. Though she cannot go back to Neverland, she experiences it vicariously by "tidying up" her children's minds. Through her we see what Wendy is destined to become, as well as Barrie's expression of the pivotal, sacred role of the mother.

The male characters also play dual roles – sons and husbands – though they mostly serve to further define the female heroines. Alice suffers an identity crisis throughout her time in Wonderland, particularly since her place in the hierarchy of power is constantly changing. Her relationships with the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, the King of Hearts, and others are what she uses to understand herself within the dream. Conversely, in *Peter Pan*, Barrie's male characters are defined by their relationship to the dominant females within the story. Mr. Darling and Captain Hook illustrate the dual nature of the Victorian male, though neither figure embodies the typical stereotype. The authors' treatment of the male characters does show insight into, and even a forgiveness for, their multiple flaws, but they are most often depicted according to how their behavior affects the heroines. By creating these girl-characters in fantastic settings, both authors made an appeal to their audience to become (or avoid becoming) what seemed inevitable: adult females. By doing so, they also displayed how the institution of motherhood affected their own realities and, perhaps subconsciously, what they wanted to sustain or change about the gendered expectations of Victorian society.

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## Introduction

“These writers brought back the fairies; they created nonsense; they broke through the limitations that had been set by reason, opening the doors to other dimensions of time and space, and to dreams and visions.”

-Sheila Egoff, *Worlds Within*

E.M. Forster, in *A Passage to India*, suggests that “Most of life is so dull that there is nothing to be said about it, and the books and talk that would describe it as interesting are obliged to exaggerate, in the hope of justifying their own existence” (146). He goes on to explain that even on the most extraordinary of days, the majority of one’s time is spent doing un-extraordinary, mundane activities like sleeping or making one’s breakfast. The ennui and existential angst displayed by early modernists, such as Forster, proceeded from an age known for both social and individual uncertainty. The rapid industrial progress and oppressive moral principles of the nineteenth century led directly to an often dull and painful reality for the average Victorian household. The difficulties of everyday life during the period, as well as the ongoing scientific scholarship carried over from the Enlightenment, could explain the public’s obsession with the possibility of bottomless rabbit holes in every country garden and adventurous tropical islands just off the coast of the London night sky. The Land of Faerie, or any mysterious and magical world, had been all but killed off by an increasingly solid and palpable landscape.

The attribution of the imaginary world or “fairy story” to childhood, in fact the concept of childhood as a specific psychological state, was a relatively new idea at this

time. According to Sheila Egoff, “the notion that fairy tales were fit fare only for the young came much later, when they were put into print. . . . just as tales were not separated by age groupings, neither were children, for in the minds of medieval people the idea of a unique state called ‘childhood’ simply did not exist” (22). Throughout the nineteenth century, a growing understanding of the developmental stages of psychology – especially during childhood – led to a change in children’s literature. Children were no longer viewed as merely small adults. They process information and even distinguish reality differently. Therefore, they may enjoy a nonsensical tale like *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* over the morality stories often found in Victorian nurseries. However, even after this perceived narrowing of audience, adults who had for centuries created, shared, and consumed stories of imaginary worlds still maintained a reverence for and devotion to such literature. Nostalgic for the perhaps imaginary past, grown men and women sought to return to a more adventurous time and place.

To assume that the popularity of such stories as Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* and J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (the book’s original title) resulted from the responses of a child-only audience would be a mistake. Coming on the heels of Wordsworthian Romanticism, nineteenth-century children were considered to be more in touch with the spiritual or “other” world than the more corrupt adult. According to Egoff, by 1865, the year *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was first published, “Wordsworth’s view of the child as a product of heaven rather than a natural prey of the devil had sifted into the popular imagination” (37). Instead, it may be more appropriate to widen our discussion of “audience” to include the Victorian mother who was both steeped in the world of the imaginary via her children and consumed by the mundane realities of her domestic

sphere. According to Judith Rowbotham, the pervasive social thought at the time was that women “were naturally formed to occupy the more passive, private sphere of the household and home where their inborn emotional talents would serve them best” (5-6). Regardless of whether or not women enjoyed their “natural” occupation, it was understood that they had a certain role to play and were given little other choice. As they were often generally absent from the public, political, commercial, and military spheres of their husbands, the desire to believe that fantastic and out-of-the-way adventures were still possible just beyond the nursery window could have been quite strong. In fact, the unrealistic expectations of the Victorian “Household Angel” (Rowbotham’s phrase) would easily lend themselves to reinterpretation in “imaginary” terms since the ideal itself was not based in reality.

The “Angel” ideal, though presented as the goal for all women, was far from the lived experience of most Victorian women. In fact, the standards and expectations resulting from the “doctrine of the separate spheres” were contested even as they were being formulated. According to Estelle B. Freedman and Erma Olafson Hellerstein:

The domestic ideal should not, however, be confused with the personal experiences of women, whether at home or in the workplace. Despite the rhetoric about the wife’s ‘domestic empire’ or the home as a refuge, a woman’s daily world was likely to be a single, poorly ventilated room in which an entire family ate and slept, and all too often worked as well. (118)

As the “domestic dream” was unattainable to the vast majority of women, even in many middle-class households, it was as much a fairy tale as Wonderland or Neverland.

My thesis explores the world of the “imaginary” experienced by the characters in Carroll’s and Barrie’s books and its connection to the world of the “mundane” experienced by the typical Victorian housewife and mother. Both experiences are intimately connected within the texts, primarily in the characters’ dual roles as dictated by the gendered expectations of Victorian society. Both Alice and Wendy experience mini-versions of their future lives in the imaginary world. They exist as girl and mother simultaneously. Carroll, by creating a hostile environment, grotesque mother-images, and a confused, argumentative Alice, shows a very negative portrait of motherhood, since he never wanted little girls (especially Alice Liddell, the real girl-model for his heroine) to become women in the first place. In contrast, Barrie depicts “motherhood” as sacred and beautiful, something to be desired and protected at all costs. By necessity, it is connected to female sexuality; yet it is far superior in value to mere sexual power. Both authors created an escape from the mundane realities of Victorian life wherein the audience could contemplate its societal role. Barrie’s story elevates mothers and their connection to eternal childhood, while Carroll’s elevates girlhood, questioning the absurdities of “grown-up” reality.

Alice and Wendy are not the only characters with a dual existence, which further exemplifies the wider appeal of these books. The authors are sympathetic and often critical of the gender roles the other characters must fill as well. Each female character must reconcile herself to Victorian stereotypes and beliefs concerning women. Since women were more sheltered from the “evils” of public life, they were considered to be a moralizing influence on their husbands and families. However, if exposed to such evils, they were also seen as weaker and more susceptible to corruption. For example, Tinker



Bell, the working-class, profane fairy to Wendy's middle-class angel, is allowed much more freedom of expression and power to control her life than Wendy, though this freedom comes with a price. Primarily, she seeks Peter's company and attention, but she must settle for second place when Wendy is around. Tiger Lily, though virginal and pure, is also violent and masculine as she fights alongside the braves of her tribe. Peter views her as an equal, though she wishes to be romantically desirable. Mrs. Darling, the representation of perfect motherhood, is Barrie's professed "favorite" character. Though she cannot go back to Neverland, she experiences it vicariously by "tidying up" her children's minds. Through her we see what Wendy is destined to become, as well as Barrie's expression of the pivotal, sacred role of the mother.

Carroll's topsy-turvy world often turns gender roles upside down, highlighting the unpleasant realities of grown-up life. The Duchess and the Queen of Hearts present a grotesque version of motherhood which Alice hopes to avoid. She must, however, mirror their violent actions in order to escape Wonderland, suggesting that Alice's grown-up future is as inevitable as it is frightening. She is often placed in maternal positions (rescuing the Duchess's "baby" from her toxic house and assuming charge of the Caucus Race prizes), though she is always relieved when she can leave such responsibilities behind. Her ultimate relief – waking from Wonderland – comes when she denies her dream's relevance and, ironically, welcomes returning to her mundane, Victorian childhood.

The male characters also play dual roles – sons and husbands – though they mostly serve to further define the female heroines. Alice suffers an identity crisis throughout her time in Wonderland, particularly since her place in the hierarchy of power

is constantly changing. Her relationships with the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, the King of Hearts, and others are what she uses to understand herself within the dream. Her changing physical size often predicts her power within these relationships; yet, she is also challenged in a battle of wits which she loses to the ridiculous Mad Hatter. The Hatter's dizzying rhetoric places her in the subordinate position, as female intellect was considered inferior at the time. It is not until the trial scene that Alice asserts both physical and intellectual dominance over the other characters, and this behavior serves to destroy Wonderland – the model of her future life as a grown woman.

Conversely in *Peter Pan*, Barrie's male characters are defined by their relationship to Wendy and Mrs. Darling – the dominant females within the story. Mr. Darling and Captain Hook illustrate the dual nature of the Victorian male, though neither figure embodies the typical stereotype. Mr. Darling attempts to be the strong, authoritarian father figure in his home but is actually loving, emotional, and boyish at heart. This endears him to his wife and children, and, in the end, he is very happy. Because he does not play the formidable patriarch role, Hook is strong, virile, and powerful, but his "evil pirate" persona leaves him lonely, unloved, and even loathed by Wendy, whom he secretly wishes to impress. Both characters challenge the typical image of Victorian "maleness" while upholding its need for female recognition. This need is pivotal in *Peter Pan* and questionable in *Alice*; yet, both stories emphasize females generally and mothers specifically – their influence, fears, regrets, and joys – in a wholly new and poignant way during a time period when the ideal "maternal image" was as imaginary as Wonderland itself.

## Chapter 1

### The Child is Mother of the Woman: Alice in Carroll's Imaginary Nightmare

“You grow up readin’ about pirates and cowboys and spacemen and stuff, and jus’ when you think the world’s all full of amazin’ things, they tell you it’s really all dead whales and chopped-down forests and nuclear waste hanging about for millions of years. ‘Snot worth grown’ up for, if you ask my opinion.”

-Adam, the Anti-Christ, in Gaiman and Pratchett's *Good Omens*

When William Wordsworth wrote his poem, “My Heart Leaps Up” in 1802, he could not have anticipated the drastic evolution of childhood imagery that would take place over the course of the nineteenth century. The paradox he poses in the text, however, which requires us to rethink the traditional understanding of child and adult roles, both reflects and predicts this changing ideology. The poet describes his connection to nature as both grown man and child when he writes:

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky:

So it was when my life began,

So is it now I am a man.

He goes on to say, “The Child is father of the Man” thus placing the “Child” in a position of high importance and influence over the “Man” he is destined to become. The attitude revealed in this well-known Romantic poem anticipates how childhood was viewed during the Victorian era. In *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, published in 1865 and

generally marketed to a child-audience, Lewis Carroll presents a Victorian child's imaginary world and the confusing, frustrating and terrifying adventures she encounters there. Many of her experiences mirror what she does and will encounter in her real life – both as a young girl and, eventually, as a grown woman and mother. In Wonderland, Alice exists dually as child and mother, vacillating between the two as her physical self changes. This dual existence exhibits the similarities between Victorian motherhood and childhood: both were viewed as ennobling forces (when properly confined to their homes and churches), both were products of and resided within the domestic sphere, both were seen as commodities to be protected from the dangers of the outside world, and both were expected to submit to authorities that were more physically, economically, and politically powerful than themselves.

Alice is clearly presented as a child, and yet she often exhibits maternal instincts and impulses however clumsily she executes them. When her physical size and bold behavior grow too large for Wonderland, the dream dissolves and she returns to her mundane life above ground where the story began. She is then immediately placed, by her sister, within the context of a mother/daughter cycle where (despite her temperamental behavior in Wonderland) the reader is supposed to believe she will be calm and happy. The idea that her frustrating, violent, and unorthodox reactions in Wonderland will someday evoke within her the “simple and loving heart of her childhood,” as her sister predicts, seems quite silly; yet, it does reveal another child/mother connection within the text: that she will have just as little choice in the direction her life will take as a grown woman as that she does as a child. She will soon

be expected to play out her domestic role in society and to do so with the “simple and loving heart” she may never have had.

The desire to write books for and about children was a product of the Victorian imagination. According to Jackie Wullschläger, the “vision of children as good, innocent and in some way connected with spirituality and imagination” was an “idea inherited from the Romantics, but transformed by Victorian morality, and popularized and sentimentalized” (13). Because of this assumed spiritual connection, interaction with children was seen as ennobling, inspiring, and “morally uplifting” as it reminded adults of their divine roots – that which mundane reality had destroyed (40). Carroll’s story “was born into a society which made a cult of childhood,” even though the realities of childhood during the period were quite harsh. The iconography of Victorian childhood promoted an idealized, yet disturbing, image of youth and innocence very similar to the fictional “Household Angel”: “All were images of eternal youth: Dickens’s Little Nell, Wilde’s Dorian Gray, the girl in Millais’s *Cherry Ripe* and the boy in his painting *Bubbles*” (7). Many of these images were not only idealized, but dark and somewhat troubling, suggesting a cultural obsession bordering on the deviant. Such a situation would be ideal for the publishing and sale of books written about children, but not necessarily for children themselves. Immersed in the realm of childhood as caretakers and guardians, mothers would also have been a common, though perhaps invisible, audience.

In fact, motherhood and childhood share an even more specific condition which united them in the enjoyment of imaginary worlds: their own positions of fantasy. The middle and upper class wife, also protected from the evils of the outside world, was seen

as a moralizing influence in her marriage and family. She was, according to Sarah Stickney Ellis's 1843 conduct book for wives, always to "conduct herself, so that all the members of her household shall be united as a Christian family, strengthening and encouraging each other in the service of the Lord" (*Wives* 32-3). This responsibility inevitably came tethered to a considerable amount of guilt if one fell short of the ideal. A wife's position in the home was similarly "transformed by Victorian morality" and "popularized and sentimentalized" so that the regular, mundane tasks of maintaining the household took on a position of lofty and even sacred importance. Just as Wendy Darling does forty years later, Alice embodies this connection between childhood and motherhood; yet, Alice's confusion and struggles challenge the idea that such abilities and feelings are natural and God-given.

A discussion of *Alice* in light of its insight into motherhood would be incomplete without first reconciling it to childhood as the influence of Wordsworthian Romanticism continued into this period. The book was certainly marketed to children and continues today to be categorized within the canon of "children's literature." Alice delights in childish activities such as playing make-believe and making daisy chains. Carroll even used a real child, Alice Liddell, as the prototype for his heroine. However, from the moment Alice takes off after the White Rabbit, she challenges the basis of "real" experiences, roles, and responsibilities – especially those most associated with childhood and motherhood in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Ellis, domestic life was a haven from the outside world, one which women should be grateful to inhabit: "Can it be a subject of regret that she is not called upon, so much as a man, to calculate, to compete, to struggle, but rather to occupy a sphere in which the elements of

discord cannot with propriety be admitted” (*Daughters* 14-5). Alice, however, is surrounded by discord in Wonderland. She swims in her own tears, argues with talking animals, runs off with a duchess’s baby, eats and drinks things of unknown origin, wonders at her own true identity, challenges a queen, and speaks with open defiance in a court of law, all before waking up and inspiring dreams of gentle, domestic happiness and blissful childhood memories in her sister. These challenges to Victorian reality would have seemed both frightening and empowering to women of all ages, and her ability to wake up exactly where she started from was both a relief and a disappointment.

The comparison between Alice’s experiences and the experiences of the typical Victorian child extends to the seemingly arbitrary rules governing a woman’s domestic sphere. She is treated like a child, protected, controlled, and infantilized while, ironically, responsible for everyone’s well being. Children are largely dependent on both their society and their guardians concerning the direction their life will take. As women were shielded from the dangers of the public sphere (“to calculate, to compete, to struggle”), they were similarly limited under the guise of protection. The desire to do as Alice does during the trial scene – to call the Queen’s bluff – symbolizes “the theme of a child’s rebellion,” as Richard Kelly observes (35), but also the rebellion of any group defined by a nonsensical and contradictory set of rules:

“No, no!” said the Queen. “Sentence first – verdict afterwards.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” said Alice loudly. “The idea of having the sentence first!”

“Hold your tongue!” said the Queen turning purple.

“I wo’n’t!” said Alice.

“Off with her head!” the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

“Who cares for *you*?” said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time).

“You’re nothing but a pack of cards!” (154)

Kelly argues that this last statement “dangerously threatens to unravel the substance of Wonderland, and which, in fact, [it] does.” Alice finds herself waking from her dream soon after she exposes the characters’ powerlessness in this scene. The fact that the very next scene transports her back to her sister and reveries of domestic bliss exposes the trial scene and Alice’s rebellion as a warning against such spirited behavior as a grown woman. Just as Wonderland dissolves the moment the child Alice decides she has had enough of its “stuff and nonsense,” the adult Alice’s future calm, domestic sphere might likewise dissolve should she not take the Caterpillar’s advice to “Keep [her] temper” (84).

Alice’s short temper exposes a contradiction between Carroll’s text and the idealized female. Her sweetness and desire to please should have been as innate as her abilities to nurture and protect. Later, when she is called upon to mother the Duchess’s baby in Chapter 6, she immediately assumes the responsibility without question. She exhibits a quasi-maternal connection to the child as she appeals for its safety to the violent cook: ““Oh, *please* mind what you’re doing!’ cried Alice, jumping up and down in an agony of terror. ‘Oh, there goes his *precious* nose!’, as an unusually large saucepan flew close by it, and very nearly carried it off” (96). Her inactive appeals then transform into an active “rescue” as she leaves the house with the baby. However, her initial belief that she was better able to take care of the child than anyone in the Duchess’s household – ““If I don’t take this child away with me,’ thought Alice, ‘they’re sure to kill it in a day or two. Wouldn’t it be murder to leave it behind?’” – is challenged by the baby’s



transformation into a pig. The change surprises Alice, but as she was beginning to think better of taking the child to begin with – “Now, what am I to do with this creature, when I get home?” – she “felt quite relieved to see it trot away quietly into the wood” (98-9). Symbolically, at least, in Alice’s most maternal role yet, she has succeeded in raising a baby to be a pig. This could reflect badly on her motherly potential, except that Alice clearly presents it as the best option for all involved: “‘If it had grown up,’ she said to herself, ‘it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes a rather handsome pig, I think.’” Carroll then goes on to disregard the importance of the pig-baby’s fate by having the Cheshire Cat ask first in an offhanded manner, “By-the-bye, what became of the baby?” and then to return a minute later to ask, “Did you say ‘pig,’ or ‘fig’?” (101). This curious question, according to Kelly, “suggests, in typical Wonderland fashion, that it really does not matter what happened to the baby after all” (28). Clearly, Alice is the only character who cares at all what happens to the creature; yet, even she is relieved to have it off her hands. The Cat’s question, however, reduces the whole experience back to nonsense by displaying the absurdity of a situation originating with a baby being “flung” at her.

The fact that the Duchess flung her own baby at Alice, that motherhood was literally thrown at her, reflects her powerlessness over her own fate as both woman and child. From her descent down the Rabbit Hole to her awakening back in the garden with her sister, she finds herself in a dual state of bossed-about child and sensible adult. Colin Manlove describes this struggle when he writes, “the adults, the repositories of morality, are mad, . . . none of them can manage anything properly, from a trial to a chess game. Many of them try to order Alice about, but she frequently answers them back, for their

absurdity removes their authority” (25). Not only are the “adult” creatures mad, but they are selfish and childish as well, adding to the myriad of contradictions with which Alice must reconcile: “Alice is faced with a world of adults who behave like children, despite the variety of intellectual sophistication they exhibit” (Kelly 14). She handles her first encounter with her contradictory self rather well when, after the Caucus Race in Chapter 3, the Dodo announces to the group that Alice will provide the prizes. Still reeling from playing a game with no beginning, no end, and no rules to speak of, Alice is at a loss, but she does not venture to contradict the Dodo (who is in a position of authority over her) by saying she has no prizes: “in despair she put her hand in her pocket, and pulled out a box of comfits (luckily the salt water had not got into it), and handed them round as prizes. There was exactly one a-piece, all around” (69). The random coincidence of Alice’s having the perfect prize, in the perfect amount, in perfect condition despite her adventures so far (growing, shrinking, falling, and swimming in salt water) becomes the ideal solution to her problem. She has no time to wonder at this, however, or even to enjoy her success, as the creatures immediately forget what she has done for them and find fault with the gifts: “the large birds complained that they could not taste theirs, and the small ones choked and had to be patted on the back” (70). Here, Alice is placed in the mother role over thankless children whom she is simultaneously expected to mind and respect. As mother, she must extend unconditional love while expecting nothing – except potential abuse – in return.

The backwards nature of the previous scene exemplifies Carroll’s originality compared to the common children’s fiction of his era. As Sheila Egoff points out, Carroll “wanted to amuse children rather than make them good, and [he] managed to do so with

laughter and love and an invitation to Topsyturneydom that children of the period were more than happy to accept” (39). He even pokes fun at the didactic fiction a child like Alice would have read before she drinks the first bottle she finds in the hall passageway:

It was all very well to say, “Drink me,” but the wise little Alice was not going to do *that* in a hurry. “No, I’ll look first,” she said, “and see whether it’s marked ‘*poison*’ or not”; for she had read several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had thought them: such as, that a red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long; and that, if you cut your finger *very* deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds; and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked “poison,” it is almost certain to disagree with you sooner or later. (55-6)

No, Carroll does not preach to his audience; he amuses them with a seemingly nonsensical parody which they would not have been used to. However, there is an underlying meaning to his method; as John Pennington argues, “The Alice books have a consistency of tone in their lunacy; Carroll is not writing about good versus evil in the classical fantasy sense, but he . . . is parodying the whole didactic tradition of children’s writing, creating . . . an original fantasy world that ridicules past narratives and conventions” (89-90). How refreshing for a child “brought up with a code of morals, manners, and behavior that included truth, obedience, punctuality, respect for one’s elders, fear of God, and honor to Queen and country” to merely enjoy a story rather than to be rebuked or admonished (Egoff 38). Yet, beyond Pennington’s “parody” argument, *Alice* contains more than just amusement both for girls on the brink of adolescence and

mothers who are already living Alice's apparent future. To them, she mirrors frustrations they heretofore were not allowed to vocalize. By 1865, however, this code was well on its way to being challenged.

Literature written for young girls during this time period strongly reflects this earlier doctrine as it was used to convince them of the importance and power of their future role. Judith Rowbotham explains that "girls' stories aimed to explain and justify the feminine position in society, both in gender and class terms, as well as making an appeal to the emotional nature of the feminine psyche that would convince her of the need to conform to the conventional expectations of her sphere" (8). Girls learned their place in the household sphere in the same way they learned reading and mathematics; in fact, considering the belief that such abilities were innate, they were encouraged to develop domestic skills as opposed to those thought to be more masculine. Alice's poor recitation of her Geography lessons during her descent down the Rabbit Hole displays how little importance this knowledge holds in Wonderland: "I wonder what Latitude and Longitude I've got to?" (Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say)" (53). Wonderland thus becomes a dream-version of the adult world Alice will someday occupy. The importance of learning and knowledge to young women was useful, according to Ellis, merely to "render them more companionable to men" (*Daughters* 55). Although this would certainly be an asset in a culture where a good marriage was crucial to a woman's future stability, there were more important abilities for girls to cultivate. To young English girls, Ellis also writes, "you are by nature endowed with peculiar faculties – with a quickness of perception, faculty of adaptation, and acuteness of feeling, which fit you

especially for the part you have to act in life” (9). The fact that Alice remembers so little of what she learned “in the school-room” is a mere annoyance to her during her dream – “she was rather glad there *was* no one listening, this time, as it didn’t sound at all the right word” – but her ability to make quick decisions (such as come up with prizes for the Caucus Race) and follow directions (such as fetching the White Rabbit’s gloves when he mistook her for his maid) serves her quite well. In these instances, Carroll’s heroine is traditional and proper, but this is certainly not always the case.

Alice’s frustrations in the imaginary world, despite her few victories, probably would not have been much different from what she experienced in her “real” life above ground. Her Victorian childhood, with its myriad of rules, lessons, and taboos, had to be just as confusing as Alice’s encounters with the illogical and unpredictable creatures of Wonderland. Egoff suggests that Alice Liddell, as Carroll’s prototype for his heroine, grew up in a world far removed from reality. As a dean’s daughter, she “was probably the quintessence of the favored, middle-class, Victorian child. So she too is in Wonderland” (48). The stories she probably read would have been crafted with the intention of “painlessly leading the youthful readers to the paths that adult society wished them to follow to ensure that the next generation would maintain the values and traditions of its parents and teachers” (Rowbotham 3). However, as Kelly points out, “[f]rom a child’s perspective the rules and regulations of adults may seem as arbitrary and capricious as those enunciated in the trial scene” (35). During this trial scene, for example, the king orders the jury to consider their verdict immediately after the accusation has been read without hearing any evidence at all. Wonderland, again,

represents a nightmarish vision of Alice's future adulthood and its contradictory and confusing expectations.

One particular expectation Alice finds disturbingly challenged in Wonderland is that of a clear hierarchy of power. As a female Victorian child, she would have recognized her position both in terms of gender (males over females) and in terms of age and size (adult over child). However, she also undergoes various confusing changes in her physical state as well, bringing to mind the physical changes she must undergo during puberty. Due to this size fluctuation, her position in that hierarchy is in question. Even though Carroll often portrays such changes as unwieldy and grotesque, Alice does, nevertheless, display more courage when towering over the creatures around her. As a giant in the White Rabbit's house, she easily demonstrates this courage by threatening to set Dinah on the little creatures if they try to burn her out. Yet, after she rapidly shrinks, she is forced to flee from those same creatures into the woods. Here she encounters one of the most out-of-place characters in Wonderland: a gigantic puppy. Considering that Alice is only three inches tall, this puppy is not gigantic at all but a perfectly normal size, which is what makes him seem so wrong in Carroll's setting: "It is simply an oversized creature from the familiar world above ground and its presence disfigures the character of Wonderland that has already been established" (Kelly 24). It does not talk or walk upright, and all it wants to do with Alice is what puppies normally want to do: play. This places him soundly in the child position in this scene opposite Alice in the adult position. Yet, their sizes are backwards; Alice is too small to play and must make her escape immediately after the puppy runs off to fetch a stick: "'And yet what a dear little puppy it was!' said Alice, as she leant against a buttercup to rest herself, and fanned herself with

one of the leaves. ‘I should have liked teaching it tricks very much if – if I’d only been the right size to do it! Oh dear! I’ve nearly forgotten that I’ve got to grow up again!’”

(82). Their topsy-turvy parent/child relationship is a precursor to her next male/female encounter, in which Alice will again assume the inferior role.

There is little doubt that the next scene, in which the Caterpillar repeatedly regales her with the question, “Who are you?” was intentionally placed on the heels of her identity crisis. According to Kelly, “It is almost as if the Caterpillar has read her anxieties and set this question to torment her” (25). Not only does he offer advice concerning her predicament, but he also asserts a very strong opinion about her size/power struggle:

“Well, I should like to be a *little* larger, Sir, if you wouldn’t mind,” said Alice:

“three inches high is such a wretched height to be.”

“It is a very good height indeed!” said the Caterpillar angrily, rearing itself upright as it spoke (it was exactly three inches high). (88)

This concept of power being the product of physical stature would not have been beyond the understanding of either children or women during this time period who would consistently have been ruled by grown-ups and men respectively, each with the perceived physical power to control most situations. In fact, this “deficiency” in physical power (failing to take into account the physical demands of childbirth) was one of the main arguments for female inferiority: “As women, then, the first thing of importance is to be content to be inferior to men – inferior in mental power in the same proportion that you are inferior in bodily strength” (Ellis *Daughters* 8). The fact that Carroll leads Alice to encounter an influential and intimidating character who is her physical equal during her

identity crisis shows his desire for her to remain a little girl. Since he fears losing his friendship with Alice Liddell in real life after she matures into a woman, he urges his fictional heroine to avoid growing up. The Caterpillar, perhaps even Carroll himself, clearly believes that three inches high is “a very good height indeed.” The timing of this scene gives the Caterpillar a more significant kind of power, as Alice is vulnerable and confused by his questioning. Similar to her later conversation with the Mad Hatter, she is not intellectually equipped to have a philosophical argument with a male character – even if he is only three inches high. After this meeting, however, she moves directly to the Duchess’s house and her serendipitous encounter with the pig-baby. This transition, from her inability to answer “Who are you?” to forced motherhood, does not appear to be coincidental.

In addition to the pig-baby, Alice’s maternal instinct is revealed in her immediate concern for her cat Dinah’s wellbeing. During her descent down the Rabbit Hole she thinks, “I hope they’ll remember her saucer of milk at tea-time,” worrying that no one will know how to properly care for her as she does (53). These feelings for Dinah, ironically, work against her throughout the story as each creature who hears about the cat becomes instantly frightened and offended. Alice, who Carroll describes as being “very fond of pretending to be two people” (57), also tends to practice her mothering on herself throughout the story with varying levels of success. When it comes to school lessons – poetry recitations and Geography, for example – Alice finds that in Wonderland her abilities are nonexistent and useless as they will be in her future domestic “Wonderland.” Her book knowledge has little effect on her success in her dream, but her knack for giving “herself very good advice” – such as to stop crying when she finds herself in



impossible situations – does tend to point her in the right direction. Unfortunately, she very rarely follows her own good advice. The fact that she scolds herself for crying in the first chapter almost drowns her later on exhibits this contradiction.

Alice's mothering of her own feet when she grows too tall to see them anymore further demonstrates the contradictory attitudes learned by young girls about their responsibilities in the home. According to Martha Vicinus, "Once married, the perfect lady did not work; she had servants. She was mother only at set times of the day, even of the year; she left the heirs in the hands of nannies and governesses" (ix). Though Alice's attitude toward the care of her feet in her absence tracks closely with this detached concept of motherhood, her selfish concerns show that she is still very much a child and not prepared for such duties:

Oh, my poor little feet, I wonder who will put on your shoes and stockings for you now, dears? I'm sure *I* sha'n't be able! I shall be a great deal too far off to trouble myself about you: you must manage the best way you can – but I must be kind to them, . . . or perhaps they wo'n't walk the way I want to go! I'll give them a new pair of boots every Christmas. (58-9)

Alice's thought pattern here directly reflects the type of training she would have received. As the lady of the house would no longer be able to trouble herself with the mundane task of caring for her charges, she worries that their neglect may cause future troubles. What better way to solve her problem than with kindness and comfort, which are characteristically and naturally hers: "beauty and order are expected to denote her presence, . . . the exercise of benevolence is the duty she is most frequently called upon to perform" (Ellis *Daughters* 15). In this scene, Alice shows her ability to perform her

“innate” abilities in Wonderland, but her benevolence is finite as she is both still a child and perhaps, in Carroll’s view, not meant for mundane adulthood.

At certain times within the story, Alice seems inclined to fulfill her need to mother, such as when she rescues the pig baby from the Duchess’s peppery, violent house, when she speaks of Dinah, or when she assumes a scolding tone with her own disobedient self. Yet, whenever things become difficult or confusing, she acts more like the upset child she is, kicking at the animals at the White Rabbit’s house and talking back to the Queen. She wakes from the story during her biggest temper tantrum of all, when she denies the existence and relevance of all the characters by announcing, “You’re nothing but a pack of cards!” (154). Ironically, Carroll still ends the book on a whimsical note with Alice’s sister dreaming of what a lovely woman Alice will grow up to be, influenced by the lazy summer days spent dreaming of Wonderland:

Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. (156)

This awkward frame for Alice’s story has baffled many critics, and with good reason – it does not seem to fit at all. According to Jennifer Geer, “The closing paragraph of *Wonderland* is lovely but absurd as it blithely affirms that the tale of Alice’s adventures, in which mothers sing sadistic lullabies, babies turn into pigs, and little girls shout at

queens, will lead Alice's older sister into reveries about delightful children and domestic bliss" (1). Geer goes on to imply that this frame for Carroll's story, "suggest[s] that the tale of Alice's dream fosters the happy, loving childhood that will enable her development into a good woman and mother" (2). Equally confusing is the presence of the same scene in Carroll's earlier manuscript, *Alice's Adventures Underground*. Geer claims, "The revisions Carroll made to his original manuscript when he decided to publish *Wonderland* suggest a deliberate attempt to appeal to the public by associating Alice's adventures with conventional ideas about femininity" (4). Yet, this scene, the most domestic vision in the entire story, was *not* one of those instances. Carroll always meant for the story to end this way. When Alice awakens from her dream, she relates her adventures to her older sister who then continues the dream within the context of her experience as a grown woman – not, perhaps, within the context of Alice's experience. This dream "uses the tale to link a delightful childhood with domestic happiness" (3). Kelly explains this apparent contradiction in values when he writes, "The dream of Alice's sister, then, is the dream of Carroll himself, who, in his anticipation of Alice Liddell's maturity, may well echo the conclusion of the book, that Alice would 'find a pleasure in all their [other children's] simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days'" (36-7). Despite his efforts in creating a frightening picture of adulthood, her growing up is inevitable, and, in light of this, he ensures that their relationship during her childhood will forever be a part of her.

Carroll does offer a humorous parody of Victorian didactic fiction for children with *Alice's Adventures* as well as a wealth of nonsensical and amusing verse. However, Alice's struggles during her time in Wonderland had a very specific relevance to

Carroll's audience. Arbitrary rules (the caucus race, the hierarchy of power changing as she fluctuated in size), conflicting emotions (her wish to save the pig-baby while admitting relief when it ran away), and limited choices (her sister's dream of her inevitable fate) would have resonated with both the mothers and girls who may have read this book when it was first published. Alice's ability to play the maternal role on one hand while still admitting her relief when it was over in the pig-baby scene shows both her knowledge of her traditional social place and her frustrations with it. She is eager to perform what she understands as right and proper – such as speaking respectfully to the Dodo and the White Rabbit as her “elders” – but also uninhibited in showing her aggravation with the established order (or non-order) of Wonderland. This level of free expression would not have been available to a grown Victorian woman and, eventually, as predicted in the final scene, Alice will abandon such passions for a more “simple and loving heart.” Alice the child confronts discord, takes risks, wonders at her own changing self, and behaves in an often violent manner. These actions, in Victorian terms, would not have been natural, but backwards or even “mad,” as the Cheshire Cat refers to all of Wonderland's creatures. Alice the woman will go on to share this vision with her children as a memory of “happy summer days.” If Alice the child is, in Wordsworthian terms, the mother of Alice the woman, then her future would seem much more confusing, frightening, and complicated than her sister's dream suggests – more like Wonderland. The dream seems more like a warning to young girls and, to mothers, an expression of frustrations they are not permitted to recognize. Thus, Wonderland presents a topsy-turvy version of reality in which not every backwards relationship needs to be corrected or explained in accordance with adult rules. Wordsworth's riddle – “The Child is father

of the Man” – predicts that, in the future, these established roles and relationships will be, and are meant to be, turned on their heads.

## Chapter 2

### The Motherhood Connection: Wendy in Barrie's Imaginary Reality

"A ten year old boy asked me of *A Wrinkle in Time*, 'Do you believe all that?'

'Yes,' I replied, 'Of course I do.'"

-Madeleine L'Engle

*Peter Pan* was written an entire generation after *Alice*, first as a play in 1904. Even J.M. Barrie, who grew up in the Scottish Highlands, would have read Carroll's popular "children's story" and was doubtlessly inspired by it to create Neverland. But Barrie's Neverland was a very real part of the world, not, like Wonderland, a dream to wake up from. Barrie continuously blurs the dream/reality line – for instance, by offering both a dog-nanny in the real world and strict bedtimes in the imaginary world: "Barrie injects fantasy into the real world, just as he injects realism into the fantasy one" (Egoff 90). In his story, each child's Neverland, or childhood experience, laid the foundations for what the child would grow up to be. This foreshadowing is especially apparent in Barrie's description of Wendy's Neverland: "John lived in a boat turned upside down on the sands, Michael in a wigwam, Wendy in a house of leaves deftly sewn together. John had no friends, Michael had friends at night, Wendy had a pet wolf forsaken by its parents" (14). From this very first explanation, he already describes Wendy in formidable and motherly terms, and she is destined, like Mrs. Darling before her, to pass this Neverland on to her daughter and granddaughter. Even though growing up bars them from returning to Neverland, each woman witnesses the cycle's continuance as she

watches her own daughter fly off to help Peter with his “spring cleaning.” This cycle can also be linked to the authors themselves: just as Wordsworth paved the way for Carroll’s story with his understanding of childhood, Carroll paved the way for Barrie in his representation of the fantasy world and its connections to the child.

Carroll may never have set out to make Alice a mother figure, but because he based his story on an actual Victorian girl (Alice Liddell) on the brink of puberty, he could not help but show how her impending adulthood affected the child. As the eldest child, Carroll often cared for his sisters after his mother’s death and, according to Jackie Wullschläger, held girlhood and everything it entailed in a very lofty position (32). Martin Gardner even speculated in his Introduction to *The Annotated Alice*, “Perhaps he identified little girls with his mother so that Alice herself is the real mother symbol” (xv). Barrie, on the other hand, used grown women as his inspiration. After the death of his brother David in a skating accident at the age of thirteen, Barrie attempted to assuage his mother’s grief by pretending to be her dead son. “Although twenty years later his mother still fell asleep speaking to the dead boy,” according to Wullschläger, “she and James grew passionately close – he wrote to her every day, and she slept with his latest letter under her pillow, until she died when he was thirty-five” (119). His adult relationships with women, at least the successful ones, were also primarily mother/son. As a grown man, Barrie became very good friends with the Llewelyn-Davies family which included five boys and their mother, Sylvia. While his relationship with the boys, of whom he later assumed custody after their mother’s death<sup>1</sup>, is most often discussed as the

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<sup>1</sup> The word “custody” here may be misleading. How the Llewelyn-Davies boys ended up with Barrie had both to do with Sylvia’s will and a hand-copy of it made by Barrie several months after her death. While Sylvia specifically stated, “I would like Mama & J.M.B. & Guy & Crompton to be trustees & guardians to the boys,” naming Barrie, along with her mother and the boys’ uncles, as a guardian, she did not give him

inspiration for Peter and the Lost Boys, it was Sylvia who assumed the idealized position of perfect motherhood to him. He also immortalized her as one of his characters: “Mrs. Darling, ‘the loveliest lady in Bloomsbury,’ is Sylvia, the mother Barrie idealized after his own” (127). He seems to portray motherhood in Wendy, as in Mrs. Darling, as the ideal state he believed possible – promoting in them his own version of the “Household Angel,” both reinforcing an unattainable image while forgiving his mother characters their shortcomings.

This reverential attitude toward females, played out in drastically different ways, is apparent in both Carroll and Barrie. Carroll’s affinity for young girls led him to portray their growing up as threatening and confusing; his concept of womanhood is fraught with ambivalence. Barrie’s female characters (especially Wendy), however, want to grow up and become mothers and wives, fitting well the social expectations of the period: “the ‘highest’ ambition for a good girl of any social class was . . . to become a professional good wife and mother” (Rowbotham 12). This ambition becomes an integral part of Wendy’s childhood experience. Though her romance with Peter is nostalgically remembered each spring, she is not like the eternal child himself – she both wishes to and must grow up. She does, however, remain connected to her childhood by her imagination, which sets her apart from the male characters in the book. Both the wide popularity of Barrie’s story and its somewhat blatant mother worship would easily have endeared it not only to children but to grown women who could recognize pieces of

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full custody (Birkin 189). Barrie’s hand-copy of the will went on to read, “What I would like would be if Jimmy would come to Mary, and that the two together would be looking after the boys and the house and helping each other.” According to Andrew Birkin, Barrie exchanged the name “Jenny” – the nurse, Mary’s, sister – for “Jimmy” (194).



their own stories played out by Mrs. Darling, Wendy, her daughter Jane, and Jane's daughter Margaret.

Alice, in many ways the typical, Victorian child, quickly grew tired of being bossed around and contradicted by Wonderland's creatures and lost her patience quite often. Conversely, Wendy, the ideal protégé of Mrs. Darling her mother, represents the perfect blend of patience, tenderness, and a firm parental hand. Though still a child, she wants more than anything to be a mother, to keep house, and to take care of children. However, even Wendy displays frustrations, thoughtlessness, selfishness and catty behavior which would not have been considered proper for a young mother at the time, though perfectly natural in a little girl. She is so caught up in her make-believe role that she often forgets her own place in the nursery, which prompts Mrs. Darling to remind her that she, too, still needs a mother (231). Wendy also exists dually as girl and woman, displaying characteristics of both. The girl-Wendy still understands and can experience Neverland, which is forbidden to grown-ups. She expresses frustration when things do not go her way and fails to think ahead, thus leading those she cares for into potentially life-threatening situations. The woman-Wendy demonstrates a similar amused condescension toward her pretend husband Peter as Mrs. Darling shows Mr. Darling. She also displays strong maternal intuition. She is both proud of and dependent on her "sons," and she bears the responsibility of their home and general well being. Both states place her in a position which must be protected from the dangers of the outside world: in this case, pirates. Her dual existence connects childhood and motherhood just as her Neverland connects reality (her ability to go there and be a mother while still a child) and

imagination (her ability to remember the experience as an adult and pass it on to her daughter).

Barrie's own experiences with motherhood influenced his portrayal of the role in *Peter Pan*, yet there was also a major shift in how childhood and motherhood were perceived in England over the course of the nineteenth century. "Childhood" itself was still a relatively new concept, and its position during the *fin de siècle* was, at least in theory, romanticized: "Childhood was seen at this time as 'the best of all possible worlds,' and the separation of childhood from adulthood was well-nigh complete. . . . The changes in actual childhood, however, were probably neither as great nor as rapid as the books suggest" (Egoff 77-78). The image of motherhood had changed just as dramatically, and was judged against an increasingly unattainable ideal. This shift speaks directly to the many images of angelic motherhood seen in the book. According to Martha Vicinus, before this shift:

The perfect wife was an active participant in the family, fulfilling a number of vital tasks, the first of which was childbearing. She was expected in the lower classes to contribute to the family income. In the middle classes she provided indirect economic support through the care of her children, the purchasing and preparation of food and the making of clothes. (ix)

Though many of these expectations did not change, especially in the lower classes, the mother's position in and influence over the home took on a more religious tone. "From the top of society through the urban middle class, family life was seen as an ideal" (Wullschläger 14), and the mother was the reigning figurehead over and assumed representative of this ideal. Rowbotham further explains the importance of this new

doctrine: “The mass invention of traditions in various spheres of life has been recognized as an important feature of the nineteenth century, part of the attempts of the new industrial society to reorientate itself” (9). Middle class mothers were still expected to run the home and bear children, but also righteously influence in the lives of their husbands and children. Though men’s ability for moral excellence, wrote Sarah Stickney Ellis in 1844, was believed superior to women’s, a man’s exposure to the evils of the public sphere challenged that assumption. It was considered a part of female duty to uphold virtue in the home in order to empower their husbands and children to remain morally strong (*Wives* 72). The happiness of the family, its religious well-being, its status in the social community, as well as the daily functions of a busy household, lay squarely with the mother. Such importance and nobility of position would have been communicated to young girls like Wendy from birth, especially through the example set by their own mothers. Therefore, it is not surprising that Wendy’s Neverland is filled with a neat little home to keep and a motherless wolf to care for. Her later experiences there with Peter and the Lost Boys were exactly what she had been groomed for, and she loves playing her part: “When she sat down to a basketful of their stockings, every heel with a hold in it, she would fling up her arms and exclaim, ‘Oh dear, I am sure I sometimes think spinsters are to be envied.’ Her face beamed when she said this” (107). Wendy derives personal fulfillment from what she does for her “little men” for such actions identify and frame her as “Mother.”

While Alice rejects the gendered expectations Wonderland flings at her, or at least expresses relief when they are over, Wendy is fully prepared for her role in Neverland. The fact that Wendy immediately knows what to do about Peter’s renegade shadow

during their first meeting speaks to this assumed motherly knowledge: “‘I shall sew it on for you, my little man,’ she said, though he was as tall as herself; and she got out her housewife, and sewed the shadow on to Peter’s foot” (39). She even rejoices in the opportunity to use this knowledge and to portray the same amused condescension toward Peter’s ignorance – Barrie says she “exulted” in it – that her mother shows her father. The scene is vaguely reminiscent of Mrs. Darling’s tying of Mr. Darling’s tie for dinner earlier that evening after his repeated failed attempts to do so: “Mrs. Darling was placid. ‘Let me try, dear,’ she said, and indeed that was what he had come to ask her to do; and with her nice cool hands she tied his tie for him” (26). Mrs. Darling’s ability to straighten out Mr. Darling’s clothing restores order and happiness to her home, which is more important to her than any sincere gratitude from her husband. In a similar way, Peter also immediately forgets Wendy’s assistance with his shadow: “Alas, he had already forgotten that he owed his bliss to Wendy. He thought he had attached the shadow himself. ‘How clever I am,’ he crowed rapturously, ‘oh, the cleverness of me!’” (40). Wendy, however, is not yet as practiced as her mother at having her kindness ignored: “Wendy was shocked. ‘Your conceit,’ she exclaimed with frightful sarcasm; ‘of course, I did nothing! . . . if I am of no use I can at least withdraw’; and she sprang in the most dignified way into bed and covered her face with the blankets.” She is ready for the important status of motherhood, but the child in her is not prepared for the inevitable thanklessness of the job.

The main display of gratitude a mother could expect from her family was that of love and devotion. According to Ellis, “To love, is a woman’s nature – to be beloved is the consequence of her having properly exercised and controlled that nature. To love is a

woman's duty – to be beloved, is her reward" (*Mothers* 15). In addition to Wendy's being beloved by her boys, she is also protected. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Alice derives her power and courage from growing in size. Wendy, unable to challenge the pirates physically, needs the protection of her "sons" in order to survive in Neverland. She earns this loyalty and protection by performing her motherly duties well and taking care of the boys and their make-believe home. Like Mrs. Darling, she is entrusted with the most delicate and influential tasks, but, when it comes to authority, she is little more than a child herself. In the first chapter, Barrie suggests that Mrs. Darling, who each night goes through the weighty and sensitive process of "tidying up her children's minds," also needs a night light (12). Mrs. Darling describes night lights as "the eyes a mother leaves behind her to guard her children" so that nothing can harm them. The implication that she should have one also places her in the same helpless position as her children. It was Nana's night off, and, therefore, Mrs. Darling was performing the nighttime routines that normally would be left for the nanny, including sitting by the fire while her children nod off to sleep:

The fire was warm, however, and the nursery dimly lit by three night lights and presently the sewing lay on Mrs. Darling's lap. Then her head nodded, oh, so gracefully. She was asleep. Look at the four of them, Wendy and Michael over there, John here, and Mrs. Darling by the fire. There should have been a fourth night light. (18)

The idea that a mother's intuition is able to anticipate and take care of every possible situation – sewing on lost shadows and tying impossible-to-tie ties – as well as protect her children from all harm is contradicted by the implication that she too needs protection

from said harms. When the mother – the moral strength of the home – stumbles, the entire fiber of Victorian society is threatened. Yet, if she is also the “weaker sex” and in need of protection, her failure is inevitable without a night light of her own.

Barrie seems to convey here that when motherhood – to him, a divine state – fails, all is lost, for it is when the night lights (a mother’s protection) go out that Peter is able to get into the nursery. Her influence is of no assistance outside of the private sphere of her home: beyond the nursery window. With this in mind, the fact that Mr. Darling takes the brunt of the blame for the children’s disappearance, and serves his ridiculous penance in Nana’s doghouse, makes sense. Protecting the home from the outside world rests absolutely with him as Ellis implies in her flowery description of nineteenth century home life:

How beautiful it is sometimes to see [the father’s] stronger powers of protection brought into action, to defend the little helpless one from heedlessly inflicted pain! How beautiful it is to see – and happy it is for families where this can be done with safety – the reference of the mother to his authority, as the highest and the best, on all disputed points; with the treasuring up for him those select and appropriate enjoyments which are most adapted to the situation of a weary man coming home to his well earned reward – the enjoyment of his own fireside!

*(Mothers 82)*

If a mother’s reward for fulfilling her duties (providing the warm, happy fireside atmosphere) is to be loved and protected, the father’s reward for fulfilling his (protecting and providing for the family) is to enjoy a happy home. Mr. Darling’s failure to protect leads him to the doghouse instead of the warmth of the family hearth. Mrs. Darling’s

failure was to allow the night light to go out in the first place, and thus she spends her time preparing the nursery for little children who never come: “She does not need to be told to have things ready, for they are ready. All the beds are aired, and she never leaves the house, and observe, the window is open” (216). Her punishment is to tend to an absent fireside. Her mother’s intuition, though powerless to keep them from leaving, continuously prepares for their return as she tells her husband, “The window must always be left open for them, always, always” (220).

Perhaps this earned love and protection was one of the reasons motherhood was seen as such a crucial position for a grown woman. Mrs. Darling, whose general duty is to love, advocates for having children right away while Mr. Darling, whose duty is to provide and protect, fears for how much they will cost:

“Remember mumps,” he warned her almost threateningly as he went off again.

“Mumps one pound, that is what I have put down, but I dare say it will be more like thirty shillings – don’t speak – measles one five, German measles half a guinea, makes two fifteen six” . . . at last Wendy just got through, with mumps reduced to twelve six, and the two kinds of measles treated as one. (9-10)

In order to reach her full potential, the mother must love, and, therefore, both childlessness and motherlessness are portrayed as tragedies in the text. Mrs. Darling dreams of her faceless children before they are born; Peter uses motherly duties and sentiments (“None of us has ever been tucked in at night”) to lure Wendy away; Michael is forced to sleep in a basket hung from the ceiling in their Neverland home since “Wendy would have her baby” (104). Both Peter Pan’s position as everyone’s child and Wendy’s as everyone’s mother help to further this point. Though Peter despises all

grown-ups, even his own mother, he continues (unaware) to hold a very special position in the hearts of both childless women and mothers alike:

While [Mrs. Darling] slept she had a dream. 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. Perhaps he is to be found in the faces of some mothers also. (18)

Peter Pan is not only the eternal child, but the face of potential motherhood, the culmination of every woman's assumed duty during this time period. He plays a necessary part as "child to the childless," hope for the women who have not fulfilled their duty by giving birth. Wendy fills a similar void as mother to the motherless Lost Boys, whose position she regards as equally heartbreaking: "'Don't have a mother,' [Peter] said. . . . Wendy . . . felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy" (38).

According to Amy Billone, "Everyone wants Wendy for a mother, the pirates as well as the Lost Boys, and she wants more than anything to be one" (185). The pirates even fight over her; after tying her to the mast, Smee says to her, "I'll save you if you promise to be my mother" (191). The pirates' reactions to Wendy imply that if they had her as a mother, they would not have become such ungentlemanly pirates in the first place. This becomes apparent when the Lost Boys use her as their excuse not to sign under Captain Hook:

Tootles hated the idea of signing under such a man, but an instinct told him that it would be prudent to lay responsibility on an absent person; and though a somewhat silly boy, he knew that mothers alone are always willing to be the



buffer. All children know this about their mothers, and despise them for it, but make constant use of it. (189)

This line of thought leads him to admit to Hook, “I don’t think my mother would like me to be a pirate,” which infuriates the mother-deprived men. A mother’s influence is necessary for one to grow up to become an “English gentleman” with what Hook values most of all: “good form” (206). Wendy seems to fully understand the importance of her position as she bravely stands up to Hook, the same man who, just before their encounter, had lamented, “No little children love me” (187). What she earns for her maternal efforts and influence is their love, and this gives her great power.

Wendy, however, is still a child, which she often reveals in her thoughtless behavior. Though she is, at the beginning of her story, calm and coolheaded enough to challenge her father’s childish behavior when he refuses to take his medicine (“I thought you took it quite easily, father”), she does not take into account certain terribly important realities before she allows herself and her brothers to fly away to Neverland. Some of these “realities” are falling asleep as they travel and almost drowning in the ocean because of it, having to learn a new way to catch food when they are hungry, or just dealing with basic temperature changes from being up so high in the sky. Fueled by Peter’s offer for her to mother a troupe of Lost Boys, Wendy’s childish impulse to take off flying transitions first to “gentle concern” as Peter teaches them to snatch food away from birds in order to eat, to horror as she earnestly whispers to her brothers, “You must be nice to him, . . . What would we do if he were to leave us?” (59). Since he has firmly decided *not* to become a grown, dependable Victorian man, Peter lacks the forethought necessary to keep them safe. In her eagerness to tuck the Lost Boys in at night, she

forgets to safeguard herself and her younger brothers from possible dangers, trusting too much that the self-absorbed Peter will take care of them.

Both Wendy's impulsive flight and her allowing John and Michael to come along exemplify her dual state. Her child-selfish side sees romance and adventure – Peter lures her with descriptions of mermaids and flying, but her mother-selfless side sees her responsibilities to others – “Oh dear, I can't. Think of mummy!” (48). She soon reconciles the two by making sure she does not leave her brothers behind – subsequently putting them in harm's way, for their safety is of little consequence to Peter. Barrie is very careful to display the interaction between Peter and Wendy in this scene as entirely two-sided. Wendy wants more than anything to go to Neverland with Peter, and, according to Egoff, “what Peter really wants . . . is a mother for his ‘Lost Boys’ on the island, and like the winged Greek god Hermes, he uses every wile at his command” (89). He uses the irresistible arguments of “you could tuck us in at night” and “you could darn our clothes, and make pockets for us. None of us has any pockets” (49), but she first lures him by admitting “I know such lots of stories” (47). Barrie offers her no forgiveness for what this comment leads to: “These were her precise words, so there can be no denying that it was she who first tempted him.” It almost seems that, by feigning ignorance concerning the effect of this statement, Wendy justifies her impetuous desire to fly away with Peter – she was unable to resist both him and her desire to mother the Lost Boys. Actually, she is not powerless to resist Peter in this scene, she just does not want to. Despite her lofty position within the story, Wendy possesses the flaws commonly associated with children, including a self-centeredness which would not have fit the standard for proper motherly behavior. Mothers were expected to teach selflessness to

their children both by instruction and by example: “If, then, a family of children are so trained by their mother, as to seek their truest enjoyment in making each other happy, they will not be likely, after having tasted this purer satisfaction, ever to descend again to those lower aims which center all in self as the supreme object of regard” (Ellis *Mothers* 86). Wendy’s behavior in this scene does not take into account her brothers’ wellbeing or her parents’ worry. Barrie even thinks poorly of her for it, as he uses a harsh scolding tone when he describes the children’s return home: “Thus Wendy and John and Michael found the window open for them after all, which of course was more than they deserved” (222). Forever in awe of Mrs. Darling, he again shows that she has perfected the art of motherhood while Wendy was still learning: “If [Mrs. Darling] was too fond of her rubbishy children she couldn’t help it” (219). He is inclined to forgive her for the motherly weakness of loving her children too much, but unwilling to forgive the children for their selfish, yet age-appropriate, behavior.

Barrie fills his story with “references to the selfishness and egotism of Peter and the other children, although, like real children, they are not aware of any flaws in their nature” (Egoff 90). Of course this attitude horrifies Wendy who, as mother, is responsible for the behavior and wellbeing of her charges. When, for example, John or Michael would fall asleep and fall toward the ocean during their flight to Neverland, Wendy could never count on Peter to save them from certain death for “it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life” (57). Completely devoid of empathy, Peter is motivated only by his fondness for sport and amusement, and the reader expects this attitude from him. Yet even Wendy, as mature as Barrie enables her to be, displays selfishness. When she tires of playing make-believe and wishes to return

home, she makes plans to leave and take the Lost Boys with her: “I feel almost sure I can get my father and mother to adopt you” (156). She does not take into account that Peter may not, in fact does not wish to go, and this would leave him alone on the island. She is also unaware of the freedom she exercises by making these decisions – as a child, she can decide to play make-believe grown-up or to return to her child state. Once she chooses to leave Neverland behind, she, like Mrs. Darling, will no longer be able to waver between the two.

The fact that the Lost Boys themselves wish to go has more to do with adventure than a true wish to leave Neverland: “they felt that she was going off to something nice to which they had not been invited. Novelty was beckoning to them as usual” (156). As she wants to return home but does not want to have to part with the boys (mostly Peter), Wendy manipulates the situation so that she can have both. She invites the entire group to come along, and “at once they jumped with joy.” When it came to Peter, the boys “took for granted that if they went he would go also, but really they scarcely cared. Thus children are ever ready, when novelty knocks, to desert their dearest ones” (157). Though Wendy’s manipulative behavior is less blatantly thoughtless, it does not, however, allow for the possibility that the other’s wishes might be different from her own. Her reaction to Peter’s indifference is similarly childish: “She had to run about after him, though it was rather undignified” (158). She also snaps at Peter – “Fancy Wendy snapping” (146) – when he fails to give her the romantic answer she seeks concerning his feelings toward her, and leaves her without a parting “thimble-kiss”: “She had to take his hand, and there was no indication that he would prefer a thimble” (159).

The child within Wendy is strong enough for her to instantly recognize Neverland as her younger brothers do; however, the “grown-up” Wendy patterns her make-believe home after real life. Barrie vividly describes Neverland early on as a place only accessible to children, a place constantly shifting and changing due to the recent experiences and concerns of each child, and one that combines the world of the imaginary and the world of the real. Egoff further illuminates this point: “The island is a place of wish fulfillment, but it also comes astonishingly close to their home routine . . . The island is so real a make-believe world that the children still make-believe” (89).

Neverland encompasses an adventure-filled dreamscape:

astonishing splashes of colour here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing, and savages and lonely lairs, and gnomes who are mostly tailors, and caves through which a river runs, and princes with six elder brothers, and a hut fast going to decay, and one very small old lady with a hooked nose.

(13)

Yet, it includes the mundane realities of childhood: “but there is also the first day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needlework, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate-pudding day, getting into braces, say ninety-nine, threepence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on.” In this description Barrie tags the experience of childhood –Neverland itself – as both a confusing, and sometimes disappointing, reality and a state of fantasy existing only “in the two minutes before you go to sleep” (14). By this definition, Neverland differs greatly from Alice’s nightmarish Wonderland with its frightening portrayals of the adult world. In mapping out Neverland, Barrie is actually mapping out the minds of his child characters. According to Susan Honeyman,

“Barrie suggests that mapping a child’s mind is like reading a palimpsest that defies linear comprehension. Childhood becomes a region as difficult to map as it is to fix by language, and perhaps, for that reason, it is all the more desirable to imagine” (23). This is precisely why Wendy’s existence in Neverland is so pivotal. She is on the verge of leaving the reality of childhood (and Neverland) behind, yet she will maintain her ability to access the abstract memory of it: “Wendy is able to grow up, a process that, Barrie is clearly trying to show, does not require the abandonment of imagination” (Egoff 91). She gives both the child and grown woman reader of *Peter Pan* hope that Neverland may forever be a part of them.

The dream of Alice’s sister at the end of her story could double for Wendy’s future as well, for she is destined for the same domestic fate Mrs. Darling endures. Wendy’s distinct part in the mother-daughter cycle of her story is tightly wound into Barrie’s theme. According to Egoff, “While becoming the perfect mother, Wendy retains and values the dreams of childhood. Both her daughter, Jane, and Jane’s daughter, Margaret, fly off with Peter. This revivification of such dreams in succeeding generations signals Wendy’s embrace of them not only as a child, but as an adult” (91). Not only does this cycle continue – “When Margaret grows up she will have a daughter, who is to be Peter’s mother in turn; and thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless” (242) – but another one as well. As each daughter takes her turn mothering Peter, each mother takes her turn mourning the loss of her girlhood and wishing she could mean as much to him again: “Wendy did not know how to comfort him, though she could have done it so easily once. She was only a woman now, and she ran out of the room to try to think” (240). Barrie, despite his reverence for mothers in

general and Mrs. Darling in particular (“Some like Peter best, some like Wendy best, but I like her best”), acknowledges what they leave behind in growing up and shows their feelings of regret for doing so (219). Yet they remember more than the boys do: “all the boys were grown up and done for by this time; so it is scarcely worth saying anything more about them” (234). A mother’s connection to Neverland exists in her ability to see into her children’s minds, in the night lights she ignites to protect them and, as we will see in the next chapter, in a sacred kiss she has set aside only for Peter.

Throughout *Peter Pan*, Barrie uses a common understanding and reverence for childhood and motherhood to establish a very real Neverland for his audience. The success of the story was undoubtedly fueled by this ability: “the creation of an essentially fictional world depends on an essentially emotional reaction by the reader channeled through the images and languages employed by a particular author” (Rowbotham 1). Mrs. Darling as the perfect mother and Peter Pan as the eternal child were clear representations of the period’s social mores, easily understood and loved by his audience. Yet, Wendy is the character who connects the two and sets Neverland apart from its predecessors. The existence of Neverland as a real place and its various connections to both childhood reality and motherhood memory further suggest that Barrie’s audience consists of both groups. Wendy represents the cross-over character that unites both childhood and motherhood within the story. She exists fully as a child, making impulsive and dangerous decisions without thinking ahead, selfishly manipulating situations without considering the feelings of others, and failing to accept the thanklessness of her maternal position. Her life in Neverland itself shows that she is a child at the time, possessing the ability to experience its reality. She is also, however, a very real mother

figure who draws power and position from the love and devotion of her sons. Her Neverland is a compilation of all she wishes for her adult life: a devoted and loving family, a cozy home, and domestic chores and responsibilities. Wendy's ability to experience Neverland both as child and adult blurs the line between Barrie's real and imagined worlds. While Carroll clearly explains Alice's adventures as a dream, Barrie builds on his predecessor and extends Neverland into the real world, defying rational explanations and creating a magical realm capable of uplifting and celebrating mothers, while subtly questioning the societal limitations of their role.



### Chapter 3

#### The Ladies of Dreamland: The Sacred, the Profane, and the Grotesque

“The fragmentation process . . . can be very functional. I think that’s why a lot of women have affairs, why they lead other lives. It all has to come out some way unless you find a way to say, *No, I’m one person, I let my hair down, I have a good time with my friends, I put my hair back up, but either way I’m the same person – I just have different sides.*”

-Tori Amos from *Piece by Piece*

Alice and Wendy exist within their stories as both little girls and mothers, each defining her imaginary world within this duality. Alice’s Wonderland is clearly a dream world foreshadowing the confusion, even horror, of becoming an adult woman and mother. Wendy’s Neverland is the real experience of childhood played out in make-believe terms. It is a haven for her mothering instincts, inherited from Barrie’s favorite character – Mrs. Darling – and it also foreshadows her maturity when she will only understand Neverland as an imaginary place. The duality each girl experiences as well as the consistent references to their grown lives would have felt familiar to the typical female Victorian reader. All women, in one way or another, were viewed at the time as balancing precariously on a spectrum of sacred and profane, angel and whore, Madonna and harlot. They possessed abilities and tendencies to fall in either direction and, in the case of young, middle-class girls, were to be protected from their “bad” potential at all times. Many of Carroll’s and Barrie’s other characters challenge this particular belief. Tinker Bell, for example, Wendy’s foil, acts however she wishes without fear of seeming

too sexual or risqué. Tiger Lily is more modest in her sexuality but is also given the freedom to behave as Peter's equal. The Duchess and the Queen of Hearts symbolize grotesque motherhood, showing Alice ill-behaved, frightening examples of what it means to be a "grown-up." Each female character must, and does, reconcile herself to this dual state revealing, in Wendy's case, a stark contrast to the main heroine, and, in Alice's case, a warning against growing up.

One of the few discernable quotations from the character of Tinker Bell in Barrie's *Peter Pan* is the phrase, "You silly ass." She repeatedly directs it at Peter as he fails to notice her romantic feelings toward him and the threat Wendy poses to her position in his life. When first introduced to Wendy, the differences between her and the smiling, blond, curvy-cute fairy of Walt Disney fame are apparent: "It was a girl called Tinker Bell, exquisitely gowned in a skeleton leaf, cut low and square, through which her figure could be seen to the best advantage. She was slightly inclined to *embonpoint*" (35). Her seductive, voluptuous physical appearance is paired later on with a sassy attitude and a tendency to use less-than-ladylike language:

[F]or one moment Wendy saw the romantic figure come to rest on the cuckoo clock. "O the lovely!" she cried, though Tink's face was still distorted with passion.

"Tink," said Peter amiably, "this lady says she wishes you were her fairy."

Tinker Bell answered insolently.

"What does she say, Peter?"

He had to translate. "She is not very polite. She says you are a great ugly girl, and that she is my fairy."

From this initial scene, the difference between each female's relationship with Peter is clear. Wendy, from her first words to Peter – “Boy, why are you crying?” – and her first action of sewing on his shadow, places herself in a position of caretaker, though she harbors romantic feelings for him as well. Upon hearing of his adventures among the fairies, she gives him “a look of intense admiration” which only grows along with their familiarity (42). Emulating her mother's attitude toward her father, she is, at first, very motherly in how she attempts to win his affections. However, when he first wins her over by saying, “one girl is more use than twenty boys,” she offers to give him a kiss (40). However, he has no idea what a traditional kiss is. As he admits to Wendy, “I ran away the day I was born,” he never would have experienced his mother's kiss (41), and, considering his contempt for everything grown-up, has no understanding of a romantic kiss. He thinks she is offering something concrete and holds out his hand expectantly. Though she would prefer to give him a real kiss, she hands him a thimble, which Peter playfully and thoughtlessly accepts.

The thimble Peter and Wendy pass between them is symbolic in multiple ways. Wendy means it as a romantic gesture, and Peter ignorantly accepts it. This, M. Joy Morse suggests, places her in a position of power imitating the “sexual influence of wife over husband.” Besides Peter's acceptance, the shape of the thimble itself, “once an open-ended sheath, not only evokes the shape of a wedding ring, but also serves as a vaginal image, recalling female sexual power” (297-98). For a pre-Oedipal boy who ceased to grow up on the “day he was born,” Wendy's sexual power places her in a position of maternal authority over him. She does, eventually, give him a real kiss, but must give it a new name – “thimble” – as Peter now believes a “kiss” is a sewing thimble.

He refers to this odd ritual of “thimbling” as a “funny” game, and her desire for it to mean something romantic is doomed. Yet, even though her plan initially fails, her “thimble-kiss” will grow into something Barrie describes as much more meaningful. The thimble, both as a sewing tool and “wedding ring” shape, foreshadows her future domesticity as well as her sexual power and maternal authority. As she grows up and assumes her mother’s role, eventually she will harbor an abstract kiss – like Mrs. Darling’s – for Peter.

Wendy’s dangerous flirtation in this scene, according to Judith Rowbotham, would have been seriously discouraged during this time period: “No good girl would knowingly indulge in such an unprofessional and distasteful pastime, and needed to be on her guard against slipping into encouraging innocent admiration too far” (50). Such behavior could lead to an unfavorable societal label, not only for the young girl, but also her family who were to be keeping her under constant care and surveillance. Wendy’s coy attitude toward Peter, though, is protected by two factors: that she never discloses her true feelings for him, and that she is careful to show her affections by using her maternal abilities. She must retain a balance between her feelings. Christine Roth suggests that she “possesses an invulnerable chastity that aligns her with domesticity and a sense of moral duty” (49). Yet, neither is she, in Amy Billone’s words, “a stranger to romantic desire” (186). In order to reconcile the two, she mothers Peter and spends the rest of the story playing make-believe “house” as both his mother and his wife as Barrie “works to hold two simultaneous images – child and woman, dream and reality, chaste and fallen – in constant tandem” (Roth 48). What keeps Wendy from stepping over the line into the realm of Tinker Bell, a much more sexualized character, is that she is never too forward.

Tink, who knows Peter much better than Wendy, does not attempt to win him over or extract romantic sentiment from him. She knows it is a lost cause and is mostly content in having him to herself. Wendy's presence on the scene is what annoys her – "Tink hated her with the fierce hatred of a very woman" (70) – and she quickly goes about trying to kill her off. As Barrie describes Tink's evil intentions to get rid of her competition, he explains that "Tink was not all bad: or, rather, she was all bad just now, but, on the other hand, sometimes she was all good. Fairies have to be one thing or the other, because being so small they unfortunately have room for one feeling only at a time" (69). Here Barrie explains Tink's dual nature, but very aptly includes her inability to embody both at once. This definition could be transferred to nineteenth-century women in general. A woman could be either an angel or a whore depending on how she regulated her emotions and desires. She could not, however, harbor both sides: the "virtuous maiden relies for her very existence on that spectral figure of the temptress which is her compliment in the period's dichotomous literary fantasy," writes Kate Millett; "the two classes of women, wife and whore, accounted for the socio-sexual division under the double standard" (121-22). Wendy's internal struggle and romantic desire for Peter contradict the image of this merely two-dimensional woman. She maintains her virtue by mothering Peter despite her wishes for their relationship to be something more. Tink, on the other hand, though she is able to switch from one role to the other, does not wish to do so. What angers her is not that she may be viewed with contempt for her transgressions, but that she must now compete for Peter's attentions.

The internal struggle created by this simplistic view of females is further complicated by their apparent fragility. According to Martha Vicinus, "the chaste woman

was seen as exerting an all-pervasive moral influence within the home” while still being considered the weaker sex (xiv). Rowbotham further expands this point:

There was an inherent contradiction in this “traditional” view of women, that while they were the natural upholders of moral standards for society, they could, if not properly guarded by men and protected from the contaminations of the public sphere, also be the frailer sex morally as well as physically. Women were both angels and prostitutes, and any temptation to fall from grace must be prevented. (6)

In order to maintain her chastity and noble character, a woman must then possess strength – strength she was considered to be lacking without appropriate supervision and protection. In a proper home, a young girl would learn to reign in “inappropriate” feelings and direct them toward more suitable activities. Wendy’s command over emotions and desires, patterned after Mrs. Darling, is a large part of her attractiveness, but, as Peter is the forever boy, this is completely lost on him: “Wendy and Mrs. Darling own this kind of appeal and, erotically, they neither compete with Peter nor entice him, nor bring him to an understanding of what sexual temptation is” (Billone 190). Until the very end of the story, Wendy holds out hope that Peter will understand and reciprocate her affections. According to Victorian societal norms, the obvious reward for her proper role-playing would be love and protection, but Peter is incapable of the former and devoted to the latter only when it suits him. This upset of Wendy’s expectations reveals a more complex, and more disappointing depiction of the male/female relationship. When she returns home to her parents, she thinks that Peter will want to be adopted by her family along with the Lost Boys and they will be able to grow up together, but when Mrs.

Darling holds out her arms to Peter, “he repulsed her. ‘Keep back, lady. No one is going to catch me and make me a man’” (230). The divergence between his fate and hers is obvious here. She wishes to grow up and looks forward to marriage and motherhood, while he was “full of wrath against grown-ups who, as usual, were spoiling everything” (154). Wendy asks him, “You don’t feel, Peter, . . . that you would like to say anything to my parents about a very sweet subject?” – concerning marriage – and he replies with a firm “No” (230). What Wendy fails to understand is that he is unable to fill the father/husband role in the real world that he has in Neverland. He controls his own fate and does not wish to exist dually as she does. The game will soon lose its novelty, and he will move on to another adventure.

Besides such qualities as strength and virtue, young women like Wendy “were trained to have no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a man’s taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity” (Vicinus x). Following this philosophy, Wendy, in her restrained pursuit of Peter, is very careful not to complain, even when her feelings have been hurt. In their make-believe home, wherein Peter plays the father, Barrie glorifies her quiet submission: “she was far too loyal a housewife to listen to any complaints against father. ‘Father knows best,’ she always said, whatever her private opinion might be” (140). The one time she comes close to aggression is toward Tink, after the children return to the nursery, and she realizes that Peter is not going to stay:

“I shall have such fun,” said Peter, with one eye on Wendy.

“It will be rather lonely in the evening,” she said, “sitting by the fire.”

“I shall have Tink.”

“Tink can’t go a twentieth part of the way round,” she reminded him a little tartly.

“Sneaky tell-tale!” Tink called out from somewhere round the corner. (230)

Wendy suggests here that Tink is not enough for him as she is unable to hold him properly at night, thus easing his “loneliness.” She offers a comparison between herself and Tink as possible lovers to Peter in which Tink, because of her small size, is the clear loser. Wendy uses her size advantage to plead her case, but, as she will soon grow into a woman, her size will end up working against her. Tink, however, is constant. As an unladylike “bad girl,” she is more like Peter – the egotistical “bad boy” – and will, as such, always share in his experiences. Though Wendy (for the most part) internalizes the fact that Peter does not return her affection and withdraws – “‘I thought so,’ she said, and went and sat by herself at the extreme end of the room” – Tink takes a certain pride in her status. She is rejected, but as a strong, outspoken fairy, she “glories in being abandoned” and understands that as long as she is still “Peter’s fairy” she is in a position of strength and able to be close to him.

The fact that none of her romantic feelings are reciprocated by Peter does upset Wendy, despite her understanding of their relationship as that of a mother to a “devoted son.” When they play “house” in Neverland, and the boys build Wendy her little home, she is clearly the mother of the large brood and Peter is clearly the father. While she sleeps in her house at night, Peter “kept watch outside with drawn sword” as her protector. Barrie paints the picture of domestic bliss, despite the threat of pirate attack: “The little house looked so cozy and safe in the darkness with a bright light showing through its blinds, and the chimney smoking beautifully, and Peter standing on guard” (101). However, Peter’s place as protector over Wendy is where the mother/father relationship ends. Though he plays the part well in calling one of his boys, “my little



man,” and Wendy, “old lady” (upon Michael’s instruction), and “pretending to be scandalized” when asked by his sons to dance, his feelings for her continue to be “Those of a devoted son” (144-45). This upsets Wendy, and when asked to explain why she, Tinker Bell, and Tiger Lily are disappointed in him, she again calls attention to her virtues while subtly debasing the others. She replies, “It isn’t for a lady to tell,” and in the next breath, “Oh yes, Tinker Bell will tell you.”

Tiger Lily, the Indian princess, presents another interesting case as she fits into neither the maternal role nor that of the “bad girl.” She is strong, beautiful, proud, and independent, fighting alongside her braves, and is described on an equal level with Peter as “his ally” (112). After being captured by the pirates trying to board their ship, she shows bravery in the face of certain death: “her face was impassive; she was the daughter of a chief, she must die a chief’s daughter, it is enough” (118). Peter sets out to save her, but not because she is a girl and needs saving, as he would have done for Wendy. He does so “because it was two against one,” and that was unfair (119). As Peter saves her from the pirates and wins her loyalty, she vows to always protect him from the pirates in return. She also, along with Tinker Bell, teaches him about “forest lore” in order for him to survive in desperate times, skills not associated with women or mothers at all, but useful to a fellow comrade – an equal.

Though Tiger Lily creates a problem by not fitting neatly into the sacred/profane dichotomy of the Victorian woman, she seems to pick and choose which parts she will adopt as her own and which she will abandon. She is not weak or dependant, but she also falls in love with Peter. Peter himself admits this when he says to Wendy, “You are so queer, . . . and Tiger Lily is just the same. There is something she wants me to be, but

she says it is not my mother” (145). Wendy, who reveals her own jealousy after this remark – a faint reminder of Tink’s animosity toward Wendy – replies “No, indeed, it is not,” at which time Barrie admits, “Now we know why she was prejudiced against redskins” (146). Although Wendy’s prejudice is brought on by her awareness of Tiger Lily’s feelings for Peter, it is also caused by a more pervasive racism against Native Americans – one which, due to the time period, was probably shared both by Barrie and his original audience. This may explain why Tiger Lily is allowed to divert so obviously from the stereotype of “the perfect lady” – she is an “other.” Barrie writes that she follows “the traditions of [her] race,” showing little emotion before “The Great White Father” and exhibiting calm bravery at all times. Despite her deviation from Wendy’s standard by displaying certain masculine traits – fighting alongside her braves, for example – she still possesses what Clay Kinchen Smith calls, “Tiger Lily’s excessive beauty and virginity” (114). Barrie allows her this dualism by describing her as “cold and amorous by turns; there is not a brave who would not have the wayward thing to wife, but she staves off the altar with a hatchet” (77-78). She is both violent and beautiful, both loving and aloof, keeping the values which were upheld by Victorian culture while maintaining her “other” status. While Wendy reconciles her duality by mothering, and Tink unapologetically favors her profane side, Barrie allows Tiger Lily, as an “other,” to challenge and maneuver through both. She offers a third alternative – a complex female figure who defies a clear moralistic definition, drastically different from the common girl character of didactic fiction. Yet, because of her drastic nature, she must also come in a form far from the experience of Barrie’s white, English audience: a “red Indian.” Regardless of what fairies and Indians do, middle-class, white, English

girls were still expected to embody the gender-specific, moralistic example laid out for them.

Unlike Tink or Tiger Lily, Wendy's influence over Peter exists in her attempts to domesticate him. Logically, their relationship extends from her nursery, to Neverland, and then into their make-believe home. The difference between Wendy's cozy little house and Tinker Bell's "private apartment" is a clear example of Wendy's place as the Household Angel and Tink's position on the other side of the spectrum. Wendy immediately takes to keeping house for Peter and the Lost Boys, cooking, cleaning, and darning socks. As Barrie puts it, "there were whole weeks when, except perhaps with a stocking in the evening, she was never above ground" (107). In fact, she was so absorbed in her role that, after the boys were in bed and "she had breathing time for herself," she spent her spare moments, "making new things for them, and putting double pieces on the knees, for they were all most frightfully hard on their knees." She thus sacrifices her own childlike impulses, those to be outside playing with the others, to her maternal behaviors – staying indoors mending clothes. Tink's occupations could not be more different. Barrie describes her as a kind of fairy antiques collector with an "exquisite boudoir and bedchamber combined" which "no woman, however large, could have had" (106). Each piece of furniture was immaculately maintained for her enjoyment, and she lit the room with fairy dust. She collected, decorated, and kept up her residence completely on her own, while Peter and the Lost Boys built Wendy's home from the ground up. Wendy must merely sing of what she wishes, and they make-believe them into being from the "gay windows" and "roses" to the knocker on the front door.

As Tink's chambers are extravagant and sensual, Wendy's are contrastingly homey, simple, and comfortable. Furthermore, Barrie negatively describes the relationship between Tink's room and the rest of the house underground: "her chamber, though beautiful, looked rather conceited, having the appearance of a nose permanently turned-up" (106). However, the apparent injustice of such a remark would probably not have affected Tink's feelings in the least as she enjoyed being in a position of glorified scorn. She is Wendy's antithesis and has no responsibility toward Peter or the others to be well behaved or to follow directions. She represents the flip side of the virginal purity and good behavior Victorian society would have valued in a woman – and she seems to revel in it. According to Millett, "The dark woman, the period avatar of feminine evil, lurks there in subterranean menace, stationed at intervals all the way from Tennyson's verse to the more scabrous pornography of the age" (122). Barrie places Wendy in a loftier position as the "good girl" who, according to Rowbotham, "was always modest, indicative of unselfish submission to those in due authority over her" (23). Tink, like Tiger Lily, enjoys a different status altogether from Wendy, allowing her to misbehave according to the mores of the time while still being a likable character. While Tiger Lily is a racial "other," Tink is a fairy with no connection to the world of the mundane. As she exists entirely as a part of Neverland, she may play out whatever behaviors the "good girls" of the time could not. Barrie also gives another power to Tink. She knows Peter better than any of the others, is not afraid of him and, according to Egoff, "is the only one to see through him" (90). Furthermore, in her willingness to die for Peter by drinking his poisoned medicine, she shows that a woman's self-sacrifice is not limited to the maternal

role. Though Tink's sexual power, cleverness, and independence may position her as a threat in Victorian England, they work in her favor in Neverland.

Just as Peter immediately springs to save Wendy from the pirates when she is captured, Tink springs to save him from the poison Hook pours into his medicine. When he disbelieves her warning, she dashes to his medicine before he can drink it and "drains it to the dregs" (179). Peter, who understands adventure, but not self-sacrifice, is thoroughly confused by this action and asks:

"O Tink, did you drink it to save me?"

"Yes."

"But why, Tink?"

Her wings would scarcely carry her now, but in reply she alighted on his shoulder and gave his chin a loving bite. She whispered in his ear, "You silly ass"; and then, tottering to her chamber, lay down on the bed.

This is Tink's moment of shining glory when she does something for Peter which Wendy has not, though she certainly would have if given the opportunity. As this would have been the type of sacrificial action expected from a Victorian woman, Tink is, for a brief moment, the superior female character. However, once saved by the clapping children who believe in fairies, she quickly becomes her feisty, naughty self again: "She never thought of thanking those who believed, but she would have liked to get at the ones who had hissed" (180). Peter quickly forgets her efforts, though. With that near tragedy averted, he quickly turns back to what he had originally set out to do: "And now to rescue Wendy."

Tink behaves in this scene much like the other sacrificial character in the book – the Never bird who takes an even greater risk in order to save Peter. She, doing what would seem ridiculous to any mother reading this story, gambles the safety of her eggs to allow Peter to float in her nest. Her gamble pays off as Peter is very careful to save her eggs. Barrie explains why she may have taken such a risk for the selfish Peter using a motif he relies on throughout the text: “I can suppose only that, like Mrs. Darling and the rest of them, she was melted because he had all his first teeth” (134). Barrie’s repeated use of this image of Peter’s baby teeth suggests the instinctual connection between maternal sacrifice and the very young child; only here, the connection is potentially destructive. The Never bird’s weakness for Peter and his baby teeth could have killed her own children. Contrasting the Never bird in this scene are the mermaids who, according to M. Joy Morse, “present yet another menacing form of female sexuality” (296). Before his encounter with the Never bird, the mermaids abandon him to be swallowed up by the rising tide: “The last sounds Peter heard before he was quite alone were the mermaids retiring one by one to their bedchambers under the sea” (133). This abandonment is ironic: “While they lavish Peter with sensual caresses, the mermaids make no effort to rescue him when he is ‘stranded’ on the Marooner’s rock” (Morse 296). Because of the Never bird’s desire to mother both, she is forced to choose between Peter and her eggs while the non-maternal mermaids are free to swim away.

Like the Never bird, Mrs. Darling also shows a weakness for Peter and his “first teeth.” Her relationship with Peter is symbolic of all mothers’ relationships with the eternal child and symbolized by a kiss kept “perfectly conspicuous in the right-hand corner” of “her sweet mocking mouth” (7). It is not a kiss for her own, mortal children as

“Wendy could never get” to it. Neither was it a romantic kiss – proven by the fact that Mr. Darling had no access to it: “He got all of her, except the innermost box” – the smallest part of her “romantic mind” – “and the kiss. He never knew about the box, and in time he gave up trying for the kiss” (8). It was set aside in a sacred manner for the love between mother and the eternal child who says of himself, “I’m youth, I’m joy, . . . I’m a little bird that has broken out of the egg” (206). According to Dr. William Acton, a respected physician of the time, maternal love would have been seen as more pure and vital than sexual love: “Love of home, of children, and of domestic duties are the only passions [mothers] feel” (178). While attaching her to Peter, the kiss also links Mrs. Darling to her own childhood: “The kiss is, in fact, inextricably tied to perpetual, childish freedom,” and “expressive of a desire for freedom from the confines of adult female power and responsibility” (Morse 293). Throughout the story, she maintains her place of influence within the home while retaining her ties to Neverland and childhood freedom. The kiss symbolizes both Mrs. Darling’s importance, a token of her present maternity, and Peter Pan’s significance to her, a reminder of her former child self. Mrs. Darling’s kiss is symbolic to the mother readers, who would recognize their own affections in it and rejoice in the holy position in which it is placed. However, her wish for childhood freedom also reveals “Barrie’s sympathy toward the oppression experienced by Victorian adult women” (294).

After her children are born and before they fly away with Peter, it is Mrs. Darling who is described as the loveliest and happiest one in the family: “And gayest of all was Mrs. Darling, who would pirouette so wildly that all you could see of her was the kiss, and then if you had dashed at her you might have got it” (12). In this instance, Barrie

illustrates Mrs. Darling's childish joy. However, the relationship between this kiss and Peter has another significance. Barrie suggests that they are mirror reflections of each other: "If you or I or Wendy had been there we should have seen that he was very like Mrs. Darling's kiss. He was a lovely boy, clad in skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees; but the most entrancing thing about him was that he had all his first teeth" (20). His little teeth and the kiss save him from Mrs. Darling's anger after the disappearance of her children, even though she knew he was in some way responsible: "Mrs. Darling never upbraided Peter; there was something in the right-hand corner of her mouth that wanted her not to call Peter names" (23). Yet, the kiss fades after her children leave – "The corner of her mouth, where one looks first, is almost withered up" (219) – as she sits up night after night hoping Peter will bring them back. Without her children, whom Barrie at this point calls "brats" for what they have done to their mother, her home is as unhappy as Rowbotham's description of a motherless Victorian home: "Throughout the century, a home with no female old enough or good enough or of the right rank to conduct its domestic affairs was seen to be a cheerless place" (18). When her children return, however, she revives; though the fate of her kiss is a different story.

When Peter first sees Mrs. Darling he describes her in comparison to his mother, only it is unclear whether he is talking about his actual mother, or Wendy, or neither considering he has very little recollection of either of them at this point. He says to Tink, "It's Wendy's mother. She is a pretty lady, but not so pretty as my mother. Her mouth is full of thimbles, but not so full as my mother's was" (221). Peter's referral to Mrs. Darling's "kiss" as "thimbles" highlights both his childlike naïveté about kisses and Mrs. Darling's duality – that of motherhood itself. While, to her, this "kiss" both rekindles



childhood freedoms and connects her to true motherhood, to Peter it is merely a “thimble” – the equivalent of the “funny” ritual he shared with Wendy. They still place her in authority over him, but with none of the emotional significance she feels toward him as the eternal boy. He carelessly takes off with it, which offends Barrie: “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” (231). It was the thimbles that seemed to confuse the issue, for however much Wendy wants to imitate her mother she is still a little girl and has no kiss in the corner of her mouth. Upon telling Mrs. Darling, “But he does so need a mother,” she is told, “So do you, my love,” as she is also a child (231). The thimble-kiss, as the profane equivalent to Mrs. Darling’s kiss, reminds us of Wendy’s childishness and also that she will someday become like her mother. She is capable of using only her sexuality to influence Peter, while showing the potential to aspire to something more as she matures. According to Egoff, “Wendy is a whole girl, just as she later becomes a whole woman. She delights in her domestic tasks (she is, after all, an Edwardian girl), but they do not crush her spirit. She knows her worth” (91). To Barrie, her “worth” as a wife and mother is not to be denigrated or taken for granted. However, in Carroll’s topsy-turvy Wonderland maternity is frightening and grotesque – a position worthy of avoidance.

Alice’s experiences with other female characters in Wonderland offer her visions of misshapen motherhood which she, more or less, counters as best she can. Interestingly, her first maternal responsibility also involves a thimble. The thimble in Alice’s pocket which she hands over to the Dodo after the Caucus Race to act as her prize (as she did not have enough comfits for herself to get one), also symbolizes her transition to

womanhood. However, as Wendy looks forward to her future role, her thimble-kiss is sweet and childishly romantic while Alice's is absurd and ridiculous. Wendy first introduces thimbles to Peter, while Alice is solemnly presented with her thimble by the Dodo (thought to symbolize Carroll as a play on his last name: "Dodgson").

Furthermore, according to Richard Kelly, "Thimbles appear to hold a special significance to Carroll" who used them in other works such as *The Hunting of the Snark*:

It has been suggested that Alice's reception of the thimble as her prize looks towards her future domesticity. Might one not see, however, in the Dodo's serious presentation of the "elegant thimble" to Alice a tantalizing subject:

Carroll's proposal of marriage to Alice Liddell? (70)

Both suggestions echo Morse's "wedding ring" and "domesticity" symbols for Wendy's thimble. In this confusing scene, Alice, the originator of the thimble, must hand it over to the Dodo for a mock award ceremony. He presents it back to her – awarding her with her own prize. She then becomes the acceptor of the thimble, placing the Dodo in the position of power – the male adult figure over the female child. Thus, this ridiculous award ceremony symbolizes a wedding in Wonderland, where Alice is solemnly presented with something that was already hers as a gift from her future husband.

Carroll's supposed marriage proposal to Alice Liddell would have occurred, according to Morton Cohen, in a more indirect fashion: "The most he would have undertaken would have been to suggest that perhaps, in the future, if her affection for him did not diminish, he would be happy to propose an alliance" (qtd. in Kelly 22). Such a subtle suggestion to a young girl clearly too young for marriage may have invoked a similar reaction to Alice's in the story: "Alice thought the whole thing very absurd, but they all looked so

grave that she did not dare laugh; and, as she could not think of anything to say, she simply bowed, and took the thimble, looking as solemn as she could” (70). While Wendy’s thimble-kiss looks forward to her womanhood, Carroll’s possible proposal to Alice Liddell suggests his wish for her to remain a child and their relationship to remain static. The character Alice’s acceptance of her own thimble ends this scene just as abruptly as Tink’s pulling of Wendy’s hair. She accepts the proposal in order to end the uncomfortable absurdity, but accepting merely moves her forward in Wonderland to even more bizarre encounters.

*Alice’s* illustrations in their final form by John Tenniel show an emotionless, stoic young girl, and, according to Susan Sherer, “established a tendency, continuing even now, to imagine Alice as a paragon of childhood innocence” (10). Carroll’s initial illustrations in his manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures Underground* are quite different, suggesting another difference between Alice’s dual self and Wendy’s. She has no Tinker Bell opposite – her original self in Carroll’s illustrations is her antithesis:

Alice’s progression from the dark lady-child of *Underground* to the saccharine, blonde ingénue of *Wonderland* is visible even at the most cursory glance and is only one symptom of the larger transformation of the Alice myth. Carroll’s representations of her, especially when she changes size, are more offbeat, somewhat surreal and certainly more disturbing. (9-10)

Martin Gardner places the shift in these images into perspective: “There was a tendency in Victorian England, reflected in the literature of the time, to idealize the beauty and virginal purity of little girls” (xix). Together, these images show the ideal little girl under threat by sensuous monsters who neglect babies, scream out death sentences, and speak

in riddles. She must act as some kind of balance to these images and, according to Kathryn Hume, “does little, but she observes and reacts and judges. Each situation is painfully new and threatening, in part because events do not seem to follow a logical sequence” (160). Yet, despite what is implied by the illustrations, Alice reacts to these challenges as any child would: she cries, she argues, and she throws a few very well-placed temper tantrums.

Before she even comes into contact with the most obviously twisted mother figures in the story, she has an interesting experience with a mother Pigeon who mistakes her for a serpent – a threat to her eggs. At this point in the story, Alice had been told by the Caterpillar to eat bits of his mushroom in order to adjust her size, but, evidently, she had eaten a bit too much of one side and her neck grows at a much more rapid pace than the rest of her. Immediately, the Pigeon beats at her with her wings in order to protect her unborn children and laments the fact that no matter where she places her nest, the serpents are bound to find them. Initially confused by the situation, Alice begins “to see its meaning” and tries to reason with the bird concerning her own identity. Unfortunately, she is not sure of it anymore either: “‘I – I’m a little girl,’ said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day” (90). After this, the Pigeon thinks to call her bluff by saying, “I suppose you’ll be telling me next that you’ve never tasted an egg!” Alice, who is always truthful, admits to eating eggs quite often. Not only does this convince the Pigeon of the threat, but it further confuses Alice as she realizes she has more in common with serpents than she once thought. “What does it matter to me whether you’re a girl or a serpent?” asks the Pigeon as the effect either one could have on her eggs is the same. The Pigeon in this

scene actually turns out to be the most real mother character in the story – her main concern being for the protection of her eggs – but she poses a sharp contrast to the Never bird in *Peter Pan* who was willing to risk losing her eggs in order to save Peter’s life. In Wonderland, the generosity of motherhood is decidedly left out as Carroll idolized not mothers, but little girls.

As soon as Alice grows and shrinks herself to about nine-inches high, she approaches the house of the Duchess. This toxic house, wherein she is raising what seems to be a baby, is Alice’s first encounter with grotesque motherhood: “The door led right into a large kitchen, which was full of smoke from one end to the other: the Duchess was sitting on a three-legged stool in the middle, nursing a baby: the cook as leaning over the fire, stirring a large cauldron which seemed to be full of soup” (95). Not only is there smoke in the air, but a large amount of pepper which causes the baby to be “sneezing and howling alternately without a moment’s pause.” The violence of Carroll’s narrative, in which the Duchess shakes and screams at the baby, is almost as disturbing as Tenniel’s illustration of the scene. According to Gardner, Tenniel probably used Quentin Matsys’s portrait of the “Ugly Duchess” as the template for this character. This portrait may have been painted of Margaret of Carinthia and Tyrol, who “had the reputation of being the ugliest woman in history” (60). Kelly points out, “Tenniel gives his duchess a striking masculine face with a head totally out of proportion to her body,” which places her even farther from the perfect picture of Victorian motherhood than her behavior alone. Furthermore, “The fact that she is first pictured nursing a baby makes her appear even more grotesque, for she is the antithesis of a maternal figure” (26).

The lullaby – if it can even be called that – which the Duchess sings to her screaming baby, is a disturbing, yet amusing parody of what Gardner calls “a happily unremembered poem” called “Speak Gently.” The original burlesque is full of advice concerning how one is to treat others – from spouses and children to the poor on the street – with kindness and understanding:

Speak gently to the little child!

Its love be sure to gain;

Teach it in accents soft and mild;

It may not long remain. (63)

Considering the high rate of infant mortality during this time period, Carroll’s parody seems almost distasteful. He transforms this lullaby into the Duchess’s sadistic verse:

Speak roughly to your little boy,

And beat him when he sneezes:

He only does it to annoy,

Because he knows it teases. (96)

This horrifies Alice who ends up running off with the baby, but reveals a great deal about Carroll’s wish for Alice to remain a little girl: “Once recognizing the pain of growth, he refuses to follow out its implications – for that would be to make Alice’s character develop, to replace her innocence with the sexuality of adolescence, and to lose her . . . to other interests” (Kelly 36). Alice the character may escape Wonderland by waking up, but Alice Liddell must grow up and develop. These “other interests” – those of a grown woman – pose a threat to Carroll’s relationship with the real little girl. Alice the

character may escape Wonderland by waking up, but Alice Liddell must grow up and develop.

Her second encounter with the Duchess at the Queen's croquet match is even more disturbing. Here the Duchess moves in on Alice to offer some friendly, motherly advice, but the situation soon turns into a threat, symbolic of a sexual advance. Considering how rude the Duchess was to Alice at her house, her changed behavior in this scene is delightful to Alice, who "was very glad to see her in such a pleasant temper, and thought to herself that perhaps it was only the pepper that had made her so savage when they met in the kitchen" (122). However, she soon finds this new demeanor more troubling: "[the Duchess] represents a terrifying sexual threat to childhood innocence" as she digs her sharp chin in to Alice's shoulder, whispers in her ear, and asks to wrap her arm around Alice's waist. "Given the heavy masculine features of the Duchess," Kelly observes, "the scene rather suggests a seduction by a grotesque man in drag" (32). Alice grows uneasy, recognizing the threat, but is soon saved by a chance encounter with the next maternal figure in Wonderland who easily overpowers the Duchess: the Queen of Hearts.

When Alice first meets the Queen during her grand procession to the croquet grounds, she is obviously more powerful than her timid husband and immediately sentences Alice to execution for being sassy:

"And who are *these*?" said the Queen, pointing to the three gardeners who were lying round the rose-tree; for, you see, as they were lying on their faces, and the pattern on their backs was the same as the rest of the pack, she could not tell

whether they were gardeners, or soldiers, or courtiers, or three of her own children.

“How should *I* know?” said Alice, surprised at her own courage. “It’s no business of *mine*.” (114)

As Billone points out, Alice ends up emulating the Queen more than Carroll may have intended: “Like the Queen, Alice experiences increasing anger throughout the book” (184). She does not yet realize in this scene that she has the power to destroy all of Wonderland by merely denouncing its authority, but she has already allowed her anger and frustration to affect her experiences there. When reprimanded for her retort with an “Off with her head!” Alice replies, “Nonsense!” and is actually rewarded for standing her ground by the Queen who eventually invites her to play croquet with the rest of the party. Before this, Alice “is very polite to all the strange creatures she meets and is astonished when they are rude to her” (Egoff 47). By now, Alice has realized that politeness will get her nowhere in Wonderland. After assuring herself of her safety by thinking, “Why, they’re only a pack of cards, after all. I needn’t be afraid of them!” she does not tolerate this kind of treatment from the Queen. Thus, Alice proves herself to be a quick learner in Wonderland, despite her inability to remember her lessons from above-ground. Polite behavior is as useless to her in this dream world as knowing the definitions of “latitude” and “longitude” and properly reciting poetry. Learning to stand up for herself, however, helps her survive in (and escape *from*) Wonderland, but could be detrimental to her success as a proper Victorian lady.

The Queen of Hearts displays none of the characteristics Alice would have been taught to imitate – she is loud, bossy, violent, and in no way submissive to her husband



the King. She is also the main character Alice needs to overpower in order to wake from her dream and return home. Recognizing her place in Wonderland, and firmly taking control of it is her only way of escaping for, as Sherer points out: “That space dissolves as Alice departs from it explains why there is no backward motion in Wonderland, no possibility to return to an established place. Thus Alice must never climb back up the rabbit-hole in order to escape” (5). The only way for her to overcome the difficult situation is to go through it – to, in fact, grow and mature. Thus Alice’s movement through Wonderland must only be forward from her “birth” through the Rabbit Hole until her dramatic waking, or coming-of-age. William Empson even suggests, in his Freudian reading of *Alice*, that “she can only be born by becoming a mother and producing her own amniotic fluid” – the pool of her own tears (qtd. in Kelly 21). Her entire existence in Wonderland is her own creation; she is mother to both herself and to the dream.

A woman’s power during this time period lay in her socially expected ability to play double role: she is both protector of her family’s morality while in need of protection against her “innate” ability to succumb to moral weaknesses. Wendy, who toys with her budding sexuality by exchanging “thimbles” with Peter, is a very realistic girl, though she is destined, as we see from her behavior in Neverland, to become a well-trained “Household Angel” – and, thus, living in another fantasy land. Tinker Bell and Tiger Lily, both harboring similar romantic feelings for Peter, are allowed different futures. Tink is more liberated in all her behaviors, and enjoys the freedom and position this offers her with Peter. She earns what she has and does not need anyone’s protection. Tiger Lily is similarly strong, but also honorable as she protects her maiden virtue “with a hatchet.” By her place as “other” within the context of the story, she is allowed this

otherwise unorthodox identity. Both characters also make sacrifices for Peter, risking their lives and gaining his respect, though not his devotion. Also offering a sacrifice to the eternal child are the Never bird and Mrs. Darling. As examples of the “angel” side of the spectrum, they possess a sacred connection with Peter even when he poses a threat to their children.

Carroll’s female characters offer Alice a grotesque vision of grown women with only the fiercely protective Pigeon acting in any traditionally maternal fashion. In order to survive Wonderland, Alice must actually emulate the loud and violent Queen of Hearts, becoming less like a proper Victorian lady in order to wake from her nightmare. Outspoken and defiant behavior in young ladies like Alice contradicted many societal ideals; yet, Carroll gives his heroine the final say in what happens in her dream. This places her – as both powerless child and powerless female – in a position of power unfamiliar, and perhaps attractive, to young Victorian girls: “Through such books, children were also given stature. To the child readers (especially girls) of Victorian realistic fiction, Alice must have seemed a most appealing heroine. She may be dreaming, but she is in command of the dream” (Egoff 48). Hume continues this thought: “For us as readers, the endings are a final irony, in that Alice finds the adventures so disturbing that she welcomes return to the oppressive world of everyday reality. This action-based adventure forced her to face too many painfully new possibilities, most of them threatening” (160). One wonders if this may have been a part of Carroll’s intention as he wrote down the story he related to the Liddell girls “[a]ll in a golden afternoon” – that upon growing into Victorian ladies, any power they had left over themselves – even if it was only in dreams – would fade as well.

## Chapter 4

### The Gentlemen of Dreamland: Good Form and Bad Behavior

“Boys are not my line. I think they are a mistake.”

-Lewis Carroll

The ladies of Carroll and Barrie’s stories define their worlds and identities by their dual roles as Victorian females; yet, this struggle works both ways. Before Wendy must walk the plank of the *Jolly Roger*, she gives her “sons” some final words of encouragement: “These are my last words, dear boys. . . . I feel that I have a message to you from your real mothers, and it is this: ‘We hope our sons will die like English gentlemen’” (191). As heartless as Hook is, he silences his crew out of respect “for a mother’s last words to her children.” His intention in this scene “was to turn her face so that she could see the boys walking the plank one by one” – one of the worst fates imaginable for even a make-believe mother. However, Hook finds himself in an odd position when it comes to Wendy: his desire to impress a well-bred lady with his good form and distinguished gentlemanly manner conflicts with his immoral, “evil pirate captain” persona. The male characters in *Peter Pan* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and in fact the authors themselves, must grapple with their relationships with females. Like Alice and Wendy, they are expected to lead double-lives, as boys and grown men, and during this time period, those positions carried a great deal of power.

In *Peter Pan*, the men’s power depends completely on their relationships with women. Hook’s power is weakened when he worries about Wendy’s opinion of him as

dirty and unkempt: signs of “bad form.” Mr. Darling’s power as a grown man stems from Mrs. Darling’s respect for him as provider and protector, and he must punish himself – in a particularly effeminate manner – when he fails. He shows further evidence of “bad form” in his inability to keep his clothing in order, yet he triumphs in the end, winning his family’s affection by admitting his failures, apologizing, and moving on by joyfully playing with his children. Hook’s first mate, Smee, fulfills the mother role aboard the *Jolly Roger*; yet his domestic duties and the love he earns from the Lost Boys inspire both embarrassment and envy in his shipmates. In *Alice*, the situation is topsy-turvy, as Alice is defined by her relationship with the male characters. The White Rabbit is obsessed with fear of the Queen and Duchess, and he attempts to reconcile it by assuming control over Alice as his maidservant. The King of Hearts is subservient to his wife and almost maternal toward Alice, which places him in a position of mockery and impotence in the story. Alice must imitate his wife’s attitude toward him in order to make sense of Wonderland. The March Hare and Mad Hatter have power within the realm of their endless tea party because their quick wit and intelligence force Alice to give up arguing and storm off. Her knowledge of what a proper tea should be like is no match for their fast-talking, though absurd, rhetoric. The Caterpillar retains the upper-hand against her during their conversation despite his small size. As she finds herself in a vulnerable position, she is dependant on his advice.

Just as a woman’s place in Victorian society was clearly defined and regulated through societal norms and expectations, so was a man’s, although a man, depending upon class and economic status, had more freedom of movement and choice of career. According to Dennis Butts:

Although family life had relaxed slightly from the severities at the height of the Evangelical revival, and continued to relax throughout the period, the father was still very much the head of the family, the role of the mother essentially supervisory, and the average family's four or five children were brought up on rigid gender-based guidelines, with the boys expected to follow their fathers into the world of business, and the daughters to become ladylike in preparation for marriage. (78)

Women were limited to domestic duties and concerns; yet the pressures on the average Victorian male to be in firm control of both his public and private life would also have been extreme. Mr. Darling's obsession with being admired and Hook's secret wish to be loved by children and respected by ladies would have been one way for these pressures to surface, for they were not offered "female" emotional outlets. According to Judith Rowbotham, emotion was not considered a male strength: "the 'true' woman was still presumed to be the professional of emotion. She both justified and fulfilled herself, authors argued, by competent use of her inborn reliance on emotion" (52). Emotion in women was considered inherent, while emotion in men, who are supposed to be logical and rational, was a weakness. With such feelings strictly relegated to females and male characters, like Smee, being ridiculed for caretaking and emotional behaviors, there was little room for men to inspire tender affection in their families. Barrie himself stated that "to be a grown-up male is to be lonely" (Wullschläger 131). In the midst of such beliefs and pressures, it is not surprising then that "*Peter Pan* celebrates the triumph of a sexless young boy over a virile grown man, Hook" (6). Not only is Peter able to attract women on both sides of the sacred/profane spectrum, but he also contests a male dichotomy:

grown-up/responsible/boring versus young/fun-loving/heartless. True “good form” exists somewhere between the two.

As a “virile grown man,” no character can boast a more powerful position in the story than Hook, and yet he, too, cringes at the thought that Wendy may disapprove of his personal hygiene: “Fine gentleman though he was, the intensity of his communings” – beating and interrogating the Lost Boys – “had soiled his ruff, and suddenly he knew she was gazing at it. With a hasty gesture he tried to hide it, but it was too late” (191). When Wendy and the Lost Boys are first brought on board his ship as prisoners, Hook makes a concerted effort to treat her differently out of what seems like traditional chivalry:

A different treatment was accorded to Wendy, who came last. With ironical politeness Hook raised his hat to her, and, offering her his arm, escorted her to the spot where the others were being gagged. He did it with such an air, he was so frightfully *distingué*, that she was too fascinated to cry out. She was only a little girl. (169)

Barrie forgives her momentary girlishness, however: “Perhaps it is tell-tale to divulge that for a moment, Hook entranced her, and we tell on her only because her slip led to strange results. Had she haughtily unhanded him (and we should have loved to write it of her), she would have been hurled through the air like the others,” and thus would have changed the entire course of the story (170). Her virginal purity and “momentary girlishness” is what moves Hook to crave her admiration and also saves her from a violent death. As she is “only a little girl,” devoid of the full sensibilities of her position (as her mother would have been), she does not yet understand the power she has over a

grown man like Hook, who still wishes for the female approval needed to show that he is a gentleman of good form.

As Hook “had been at a famous public school; and its traditions still clung to him like garments,” he was fixated on “good form.” This term refers to the mark of a true man of refinement and character, and, ironically, the two characters with the most “good form” are the effeminate Smee who is beloved by children and the child Peter who is bold and fearless. Hook is willing to die only after he has tricked Peter into showing bad form – kicking a man when he is down. This is Hook’s dying wish: “That passionate breast no longer asked for life; but for one boon it craved: to see Peter bad form before it was cold for ever” (208). Peter does not disappoint – he kicks Hook instead of jabbing with his sword – and Hook thus “went content to the crocodile” (209). Hook’s embarrassment in front of Wendy and his apparent weakness for her approval – “‘Are they to die,’ asked Wendy, with a look of such frightful contempt that he nearly fainted,” – proves meaningless, for she cares not for how he dies, just that her boys are safe (191). The little girl who was once mesmerized by his gallantry is now the grown mother, full of hatred for the fiend who hurts her sons.

The original character of “the pirate captain” in Barrie’s play – the precursor to the novel – was not very important, but as the script developed, he expanded the character’s influence. Hook was transformed from the stock “bad guy” in the show, existing merely to give Peter and the Lost Boys someone to fight, into a well-developed, complex main character. This development carried over to the novel. Barrie gave him a full name (Captain James Hook), a back story (he attended Eton before his pirating days), emotions (envy, scorn, regret), and even the desire to be loved. After the part was

expanded for the original production, Sylvia Llewelyn-Davies's brother Gerald du Maurier, who was already cast as Mr. Darling, convinced Barrie to let him play both (Carpenter and Prichard 405). This characterization then became a tradition in the play's production, four years before Barrie published the novel in 1911. The Hook/Mr. Darling doppelganger, in the context of the novel, is interesting on several levels. First of all, according to Christine Roth, "because the same actor usually plays both Mr. Darling and Captain Hook, the character seems able to travel back and forth between London and Neverland, even though he is an adult – always somewhere between the two worlds" (56). Mrs. Darling and Wendy, once they grow up, are only allowed to remember Neverland vicariously through the experiences of their daughters. Yet, Mr. Darling is given the opportunity to return. Not even the Lost Boys are given this chance, for once they grow up Barrie considers them "done for" (234). Mr. Darling's dualism, however, comes with a heavy price in that his adult experience of Neverland is twisted and topsy-turvy. The childish Mr. Darling in London has his wife dress him, refuses to take his medicine, "romps" with his children, and pouts when he is wrong. His alter ego in Neverland is a violent pirate captain, a "dark and sinister man" who broods over his inability to inspire love in children.

Since Hook and Mr. Darling represent the only two well-developed, grown male characters in the story, they at first seem to signify the "good" and the "bad" side of the Victorian man. Mr. Darling, though stubborn and childish, loves his wife and children dearly and provides for them as a Victorian husband should. After Mrs. Darling fixes his tie for him, Barrie writes, "Some men would have resented her for being able to do it so easily, but Mr. Darling was far too fine a nature for that." He laments the disappearance



of the children he once swore they could not afford by saying, “They were ours, ours, and now they are gone!” (26). Hook, on the other hand, acts as if the affection of women and children are the last things he would wish; in fact, he tortures Wendy and the Lost Boys and plans to make them walk the plank. However, he is a much more complicated personality. He cannot merely be characterized as the “evil” side of Mr. Darling as there are also similarities between the two. He, too, wishes most of all to be admired as, “in his darkest hours,” he thinks to himself, “Better for Hook . . . if he had less ambition. . . . No little children love me” (187). Hook’s failure to achieve the Victorian male ideal – serving as the provider for and protector of an adoring wife and children – leaves him unfulfilled. The only victory he can claim in the end is tricking Peter into showing “bad form.” Between the loathing of children and the scorn of mothers, James Hook is as depressed as Mr. Darling, in the end, is merry.

Both men also embody Barrie’s theme that boys never really do grow up. Mr. Darling, who “might have passed for a boy again if he had been able to take his baldness off” (216), is almost as careless and forgetful of what Mrs. Darling does for him as Peter is of Wendy: “he thanked her carelessly, at once forgot his rage, and in another moment was dancing around the room with Michael on his back.” He also reacts childishly when Nana accidentally messes up his new trousers:

The romp had ended with the appearance of Nana, and most unluckily Mr.

Darling collided against her, covering his trousers with hairs. They were not only new trousers but they were the first he had ever had with a braid on them, and he had to bite his lip to prevent the tears coming. (27)

His emotional reaction toward his dirty trousers, similar to Hook's embarrassment over his dirty shirt, is also linked to his wish for power and respect. However, Mr. Darling is not able to achieve this on his own. Once again, Mrs. Darling comes to the rescue and brushes them off, and he is more than happy to accept her assistance.

The real difference between the two has nothing to do with their "goodness," but with how the two men handle their poor decisions and childish behavior. Hook is prideful until the very end, going willingly to his death after he has finally found the chink in Peter's armor. Conversely, Mr. Darling feels so strongly about his part in the children's disappearance (however passive) that he literally sends himself to the doghouse to make up for it. Barrie explains, "When the children flew away, Mr. Darling felt in his bones that all the blame was his for having chained Nana up, and that from first to last she had been wiser than he." He has:

a noble sense of justice and a lion courage to do what seemed right to him; and having thought the matter out with anxious care after the flight of the children, he went down on all fours and crawled into the kennel. To all Mrs. Darling's dear invitations to him to come out he replied sadly but firmly: "No, my own one, this is the place for me." (216-17)

This behavior, though driven by his "noble sense of justice," is inactive and cowardly compared to Peter's dashing gallantry in Neverland. When Peter's "family" is taken away, he goes after them and fights Captain Hook in a duel while Mr. Darling curls up in a dog kennel and pouts. Though his wife and children love him, Mr. Darling's actions do not seem to embody that of an "English gentleman" who would face danger – even death – for a just cause. Yet, in mundane London, this strange conduct expresses a different

kind of courage: “Something of the strength of character of the man will be seen if we remember how sensitive he was to the opinion of his neighbors: this man whose every movement now attracted surprised attention” (217). For a man who once worried that having a dog for a nanny would embarrass him in public – “He had his position in the city to consider” (12) – living inside that kennel was a brave move. As a humble admission of his wrongdoing – distrusting Nana’s judgment – he “suffered torture” by appearing so ridiculous in both his public and private spheres until, that is, the reappearance of his children (217).

Upon the children’s return, the Lost Boys look to Mrs. Darling to adopt them and Mr. Darling again shows a touch of childish behavior. He is at first “curiously depressed, and they saw that he considered six a rather large number,” but very soon “burst into tears, and the truth came out. He was as glad to have them as [Mrs. Darling] was, he said, but he thought they should have asked his consent as well as hers, instead of treating him as a cipher in his own house”(227). After clearing this up, and deciding they will “find space for them in the drawing-room,” he fits right in with the boys as he cries,

“Then follow the leader, . . . Mind you, I am not sure that we have a drawing-room, but we pretend we have, and it’s all the same. Hoop-la!” He went off dancing through the house, and they all cried, “Hoop-la!” and danced after him searching for the drawing-room.

This behavior from a grown man, so similar to that of Peter, shows that, despite his growing up, he still knows how to crow and play make-believe. By making Mr. Darling so playful and likable, Barrie contradicts himself when he later says about the Lost Boys: “All the boys were grown up and done for by this time; so it is scarcely worth while

saying anything more about them” (234). He shows that growing up does not necessarily erase all boyish behaviors. Childhood’s sustained existence in Mr. Darling does not detract from his successful place as an English gentleman; in fact, it contributes to it in that it inspires the children to love him.

Hook’s jealousy of Smee, one of his own pirates, and Mr. Darling’s distrust of Nana, the dog-nanny, also bring up interesting contradictions within Barrie’s storytelling. Smee takes the place of an absent mother on the pirate ship as he sews and cares for his shipmates. Barrie describes him as “ever industrious and obliging, the essence of the commonplace, pathetic Smee” (183). His fellow pirates are almost embarrassed for him. When he, “ever industrious and obliging,” sat at his sewing machine, “even strong men had to turn hastily from looking at him, and more than once on summer evenings he had touched the fount of Hook’s tears and made it flow.” The work he does is, however, necessary on a motherless ship, but, because of his gender, his domestic role is unfathomable to the other pirates. Despite this reaction from his peers, Barrie places Smee in a more respected role: mother to the motherless. Instead of becoming more feminine, his behavior actually displays “the best form of all” which makes Hook incredibly jealous (187). Smee easily and unconsciously wins the love and admiration of the Lost Boys despite the fact that “He had said horrid things to them and hit them with the palm of his hand.” The fact that he uses a flat hand – a more feminized movement – to strike them, “because he could not use his fist,” proved to the boys that he was different from the other pirates, less heartless, and “they clung to him more. Michael had tried on his spectacles” (187). Instead of making him more feminine, Smee’s domestic skill, soft heart, and unconsciousness of his own virtues give him the coveted “good

form” essential in an English gentleman. It also nearly gets him killed by Hook in a jealous rage. Hook stops himself only when he realizes that “To claw a man because he is in good form, what would that be? Bad form!” (188). Smee occupies a similar position to Mr. Darling. Mr. Darling is childish; yet, because of his childish behavior, he wins a place of honor in the English household. Smee, who seems an object of ridicule as an effeminate character, displays exactly what the decidedly male Hook craves: superior form.

Nana, the house-dog who saw to it that “no nursery could possibly have been conducted more correctly” than the Darlings, was originally, according to Amy Billone, “a *male* dog and that s/he first belonged not to the Darlings but to Captain Hook” (187). Somewhere along the line Barrie changed her gender, and thus Mr. Darling’s uneasiness with her makes more sense. Not only is he concerned with the opinions of his neighbors, but he “had sometimes a feeling that she did not admire him” (12). This bothers him tremendously and eventually causes him to distrust her instinct that something is wrong the night Peter Pan takes his children away. “Determined to show who was master in the house,” he forces her outside to her kennel instead of allowing her to sleep in the room with the children. He punishes Nana for his own feelings of inadequacy: “he was ashamed of himself, and yet he did it. It was all owing to his too affectionate nature, which craved for admiration. When he had tied her up in the backyard, the wretched father went and sat in the passage, with his knuckles to his eyes” (31). All he wishes for, like Hook, is “good form,” to be admired and respected by his household. He would often “boast to Wendy that her mother not only loved him but respected him” (8). Just as

Smee strikes the boys to uphold his position as “evil pirate” but uses a flat hand, Mr. Darling banishes Nana to uphold his position as “master of the house” but weeps over it.

While Hook and Mr. Darling’s “form” is defined by their relationship to the female characters, and Smee’s “form” is defined by his pseudo female role within Barrie’s story, Carroll’s male figures in *Alice’s Adventures* define his heroine. The White Rabbit, the character who first intrigues Alice into jumping into Wonderland, is the only male character to represent the need for female approval. He seems to live his life in constant fear of the Duchess and the Queen and what they will do to him if he fails to follow instructions. In fact, the first time we meet him in Alice’s mundane world above-ground, he is hastily checking his watch and saying to himself, “Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be too late!” (51). We do not find out until later that his nervousness is quite appropriate, for he is late for the Queen’s croquet match – a felony offense in Wonderland. He is not worried so much about the women’s approval, as are Barrie’s male characters, but about staying alive amid the Queen’s many orders of execution.

The first time he notices Alice, she is a giant in comparison to him which, though it does not change her attitude toward him at all, places him in a very frightening position in regards to her. While she very politely addresses him – “If you please, Sir” – he is so frightened of her, he drops his gloves and fan and runs off (60). When he mistakes Alice later on for his housemaid, he is still fretting over the time and has long forgotten that she, in giant form, had caused him to lose his gloves and fan in the first place: “The Duchess! The Duchess! Oh my dear paws! Oh my fur and whiskers! She’ll get me executed, as sure as ferrets are ferrets! Where *can* I have dropped them I wonder?” (74). Carroll never reveals what he is supposed to do for the Duchess or why he will be in

trouble with her, for the next time the White Rabbit appears, he is marching with the guests in the Queen's parade and acting as court herald at the trial of the Knave of Hearts. In both instances, he takes out his nervousness on Alice, who he calls "Mary Ann," a nineteenth century generic name for "servant girl" (Green qtd. in Kelly 74).

As he is already intimidated and nervous about two females who order him about, he in turn orders Alice about calling to her "in an angry tone, 'Why, Mary Ann, what *are* you doing out here? Run home this moment, and fetch me a pair of gloves and a fan! Quick, now!'" (74). Alice actually begins at this point to take offense to his bossiness, but only because he is a rabbit and, therefore, of an inferior species: "How queer it seems, . . . to be going messages for a rabbit! I suppose Dinah'll be sending me on messages next!" She rethinks this idea in a second, though: "I don't think, . . . that they'd let Dinah stop in the house if it began ordering people about like that!" (75). Indeed, they probably would not, just as Alice, when she grows bigger, is less inclined to take orders from the Rabbit. Again, Carroll changes their relationship based on size as opposed to gender. When Alice ventures into his house and drinks a bottle she finds near the looking-glass, she grows large again, so much so that she can barely fit in the house. In this state, she has the upper hand and makes some much bolder moves than she did when she was smaller, such as snatching at the White Rabbit with her hand and kicking the lizard Bill through the chimney. This violent behavior, like the White Rabbit's treatment of Alice, is motivated by self-preservation. If she does not fight back, she will be burned out of the house.

While trapped in the house, she makes an interesting statement to herself concerning the situation: "It was much pleasanter at home, . . . when one wasn't always

growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits” (76). As a little girl, however, she would have been used to such treatment, and, as she will grow into a woman someday, she must continue to get used to it. Yet, as she views herself as obviously superior to animals, she has a difficult time tolerating their bossiness. The White Rabbit, though, remains subservient to the women in power over him who, unlike Alice, do not vary in size.

When Alice later encounters the White Rabbit, he is the picture of submission as he talks “in a hurried nervous manner, smiling at everything that was said” (113). In an bizarre move at the croquet match, he initiates a conversation with Alice whom he has only ever seen as either a giant he is terrified of or as a girl he mistakes for his housemaid. He never actually sees her for who she is: a little girl. Though she has returned to a size comparable to the other creatures, he is still oddly intimidated by her:

“It’s – it’s a very fine day!” said a timid voice at her side. She was walking by the White Rabbit, who was peeping anxiously into her face.

“Very,” said Alice. “Where’s the Duchess?”

“Hush! Hush!” said the Rabbit in a low hurried tone. He looked anxiously over his shoulder as he spoke, and then raised himself upon tiptoe, put his mouth close to her ear, and whispered, “She’s under sentence of execution.”

Upon further inquiry, Alice learns that the Duchess came late to the match (which we may assume, from his earlier comments, was the Rabbit’s fault) and ended up boxing the Queen’s ears. Alice’s reaction to the news is to laugh, which frightens him even more. His earlier attempts to order her around do not conceal his fear of powerful women, including Alice, who openly laughs at the Queen.



The Caterpillar's relationship with Alice exhibits the exact opposite end of the spectrum. While Alice finds herself slightly offended by each creature's treatment of her, the Caterpillar commands an immediate respect from her which the White Rabbit never does. He expects to be listened to while the White Rabbit's nervousness keeps her from taking him seriously. The Rabbit's lack of command over his emotions makes him appear silly. While the Rabbit opens their first real conversation with a timid attempt at politeness – "It's – it's a very fine day!" – the Caterpillar cuts immediately to the subject which has been bothering Alice the most: "Who are *you*?" From here on in, he acts as both a teacher and a mountaintop guru. He seems to know all of the answers Alice seeks but refuses to divulge any of them. "Alice," Richard Kelly writes, "who literally has to look up to this hooded creature, has come upon her high priest, who presumably will impart his great wisdom and initiate her into the mysteries of life. Of course, he does nothing of the kind, except by indirection" (25). He seems to take very little interest in their conversation until Alice, "irritated at [his] making such *very* short remarks," turns to leave (84). The moment she does so, he changes his approach slightly:

"Come back!" the Caterpillar called after her. "I've something important to say!"

This sounded promising, certainly. Alice turned and came back again.

"Keep your temper," said the Caterpillar.

"Is that all?" said Alice, swallowing down her anger as well as she could.

"No," said the Caterpillar.

He characteristically leaves this comment hanging for a long while as Alice contemplates whether what will come after it is worth waiting for. This attitude of superiority, though annoying to Alice, does, however, give her the impression that he may have something

wise to tell her. He is the only creature that seems to see what is bothering her and sets her, somewhat, on a path to figuring it out.

As Carroll admires the young girl, not the grown woman, Alice's nightmarish identity crisis – the size shifts especially – seems to warn her of her impending adulthood, almost as if she had the power to prevent it. As the Caterpillar is himself a symbol of change, he foreshadows her own confusing growth and transformation both in Wonderland and the real world. As Kelly observes, “there is a connection in Carroll's (and the narrator's) mind between the death of childhood and the child's sexual awareness” (16). He goes on to connect her growing awareness to the Caterpillar who “fuses the themes of sexuality, changing body forms, and the mystery of personal identity. . . . Enclosed in this chrysalis-like circle of his pipe, he also represents an image of the mysterious transformations of body form.” However, we see no change in him throughout the scene, despite Alice's predictions: “but when you have to turn into a chrysalis – you will some day, you know – and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, wo'n't you?” He replies, “Not a bit” (84). His relaxed attitude is just as unnerving as his contrary nature in that nothing that bothers Alice so immensely bothers him at all. He is calm and completely in control of the scene, which only frustrates Alice more. To make matters worse, he shows that he can read her mind as he leaves: “‘One side of *what?* The other side of *what?*’ thought Alice to herself. ‘Of the mushroom,’ said the Caterpillar, just as if she had asked it aloud; and in another moment it was out of sight” (89). Here he proves himself to be different from the other male characters of Wonderland in that, instead of creating more problems for Alice, he offers her a solution: she wishes to grow larger; he tells her how. He does, however,

confuse and frustrate her just like the rest of them, giving her every reason to avoid growing up: “‘but then,’ thought Alice, ‘shall I *never* get any older than I am now? That’ll be a comfort – in one way – never to be an old woman – but then – always to have lessons to learn! Oh, I shouldn’t like *that!*’” (77). As the Caterpillar has just forced her to answer her own questions of identity, offering her nothing but the consistency of change, Alice yearns for the easiest path: to remain static. To her credit, she quickly realizes that remaining where she is would be worse than mastering her lessons, maturing, and moving on.

The scene wherein Alice has the most male interaction in Wonderland is, by far, the Mad Tea Party. The Dormouse, the Hatter and the Hare are all male and, we are led to believe, all mad (at least according to the Cheshire Cat). While her conversation with the Caterpillar left her frustrated yet somewhat enlightened, the Tea Party (where no one listens to her and her presence is of no consequence) just leaves her upset. Billone suggests that, throughout the story, “Alice’s gender causes her fantasy universe to distort into a nightmarish mirror reflection” (179). Though it is quite likely that these characters would have treated any guest at their table the same, regardless of gender, the way Alice reacts to them is a direct reflection of both her gender and her age. She often does not fight back, and when she tries to, she finds herself no match for the quicker and cleverer Hatter: “‘Really, now you ask me,’ said Alice, very much confused, ‘I don’t think –’ ‘Then you shouldn’t talk,’ said the Hatter” (110). These words put her firmly back in her place as both Victorian child (“seen and not heard”) and female (deferring to the more educated male).

Her interaction with the three characters is so frustrating and so impossible to maneuver through that she finally just walks off. The fact that no one notices in the least that she has left suggests how ineffectual and useless a female presence at their table was – they had no use for Victorian sense or domestic order at their party. In fact, Alice usually just seems to mess up their system-less system. They offer food and drink of which they have none, make personal remarks, ask riddles with no answers, boast, fall asleep at the table, pinch each other, show dreadful table manners, and rudely interrupt each other and Alice, all with an air of perfect normalcy. However, considering that Alice walked onto the scene and sits down at the table – an outsider – they often make very good arguments for why what *she* does is the odd thing and what they are doing is the norm.

They have nothing to prove to her and they ask nothing at all, just for her to follow their anti-rules, and, since she refuses to change her perspective, their responses and behaviors cannot, from her point of view, be anything but rude. Her mundane world has not prepared her to think like this, and she is frightfully unprepared to handle such a topsy-turvy view. As in the Caucus Race, Alice is in the midst of a scene without a beginning or end, and she is completely at a loss to determine her place in it. The once polite little girl finds herself mirroring their insults just to keep up. Just as the Hatter once told her she needed a haircut, and even called her “stupid,” her retort when offered more tea by the Hare suggests that she is learning how to behave:

“Take some more tea,” the March Hare said to Alice very earnestly.

“I’ve had nothing yet,” Alice replied in an offended tone: “so I ca’n’t take more.”

“You mean you ca’n’t take *less*,” said the Hatter: “it’s very easy to take *more* of nothing.”

“Nobody asked *your* opinion,” said Alice. (109)

She is starting to understand that she must defend herself with wit at this table, but she is not quite as well practiced as the older males who do the kind of thing indefinitely in their circular, timeless life. When the Hatter replies, “‘Who’s making personal remarks now?’ . . . Alice did not quite know what to say.”

Her relationship is slightly different with the other two characters. When it comes to the Dormouse, he is scarcely awake long enough to have any interaction with her at all. He is, however, greatly offended when she interrupts his story to tell him how unlikely everything is. He thus exposes her lack of imagination which, considering the setting of her story, is curious. At each turn of the Dormouse’s tale, Alice feels the need to ask questions and then argue the unlikelihood of the answers she is given. For example, when told that the three heroines of his story (patterned after Alice Liddell and her two sisters) lived in a treacle-well, Alice begins to say, “There’s no such thing!” forgetting that stories do not always have to be true (109).

Yet, Alice herself is a contradiction, as Sheila Egoff points out: “Alice, as a true child of fantasy, is willing to take the first plunge, but she finds the underground world most perplexing and herself ill-prepared to cope with it” (47). She is the obviously mother at this table, only she is surrounded by such unruly children – from the standpoint of her mundane experience – that she eventually gives up and leaves. This reaction, along with her lack of adaptability to Wonderland, suggests that she has already grown up too much for her adventures to affect her adult life. She is determined to make things

fit into her known reality, and the other characters refuse to succumb. The only explanation she can accept for their nonsensical behavior is that they are mad, not that they are completely unaffected by her. The male characters she encounters in Wonderland often confuse her much more than the females in that, instead of directly challenging her, they do not seem to care anything about her. The most infuriating part for Alice, made clear by the Cheshire Cat's perpetual grin, is that they seem to be amused by her powerlessness.

Alice's lack of control over Wonderland is reflected by the unlikely King of Hearts. His name would suggest power, the sign announcing his and his wife's procession onto the croquet grounds even lists him first, but it is obvious even before this moment that he has no power. Carroll does not even mention him until this moment though he has many times mentioned the Queen, her temper, and her beheadings. Martin Gardner points out this couple's backwards relationship, stating, "In the *Alice* books the most obvious mother symbols, the Queen of Hearts and the Red Queen, are heartless creatures, whereas the King of Hearts and the White King, both likely candidates for father symbols, are amiable fellows" (xv). It seems as though the King has learned over time that the best course of action is to say nothing during his wife's rampages and then follow behind to pick up the pieces. In fact, this part of their relationship actually shows him to be a more effectual ruler than the Queen in that "none of her actions has any effect in the end, for the smiling, timid king pardons everyone she sentences to execution, as he always does" (Billone 184).

He, like Mr. Darling, seems to have admitted his weaknesses and decided to make his moves where they will do the most good – an act of prudence and humility which,

from what we have seen so far, was usually associated with women. As Rowbotham explains, “Women were seen as more able than men to practice self-sacrifice on a regular, consistent basis in daily life. Didactic fiction for girls demonstrated the belief that men were also capable of self-denial, and on a grand scale, but that logic usually led them to take such action rather than pure emotion” (19). One could argue that Carroll’s King of Hearts reacts the way he does to the Queen both out of logic – it certainly does not make sense to behead *everyone* – and out of emotion as his “paper heart [had] long been trampled flat by his single-minded wife” (Kelly 31). He is obviously not at ease being in charge as is apparent by his description at court: “The judge, by the way, was the King; as he wore his crown over the wig . . . he did not look at all comfortable, and it was certainly not becoming” (141). Therefore, he would much rather let his wife handle the difficult decisions.

The trial should have been the King’s shining moment, as he played such a large role as the judge. However, during the trial he merely confuses the situation by calling out random orders, asking meaningless questions, and highlighting certain points as significant when they obviously have nothing to do with the issue. He is willing to take direction and help from all sorts of sources, especially the Queen, but he also attempts to seem strict at the same time. Eventually, he shows his incompetence by giving up altogether and saying to the Queen, “Really, my dear, you must cross examine the next witness. It quite makes my forehead ache!” (147). The result is so ridiculous that Alice becomes very bold in her behavior.

The King, who had once defended Alice in a fatherly manner after her first death sentence by the Queen – “The King laid his hand upon her arm, and timidly said

‘Consider, my dear: she is only a child!’” – shows no gentleness to her whatsoever while she is on the witness stand. However, she is rapidly growing by this point in the story and has learned that there are no consequences for back-talk in Wonderland. Her resulting bravery motivates her to reject his authority:

“Rule Forty-two. *All persons more than a mile high to leave the court.*”

“*I’m* not a mile high,” said Alice.

“You are,” said the King.

“Nearly two miles high,” added the Queen.

“Well, I sha’n’t go at any rate,” said Alice: “besides, that’s not a regular rule: you invented it just now.”

“It’s the oldest rule in the book,” said the King.

“Then it ought to be Number One,” said Alice. (150)

Such a quick remark would have been more characteristic of the Hatter than of Alice, but she is beginning to adjust to Wonderland’s strange rules. However, she is also beginning to deny its significance and even its existence. When she reaches her “full size” at the end of this scene, and her full power, she dissolves the whole dream by admitting that they “are nothing but a pack of cards” (154). She recognizes the absurdity of allowing such ineffectual creatures to have authority over her, but she does not connect this oppression with her own mundane world to which she seems quite relieved to return.

Alice’s position in Wonderland consistently changes depending on her interaction with the male characters around her. Furthermore, taking her cue from the Queen and the Duchess, her relationship with these characters is defined by size, position, and cleverness. The White Rabbit, nervous for his position and his life, is subservient to the



Queen and bossy toward Alice when she is smaller than he. When she is larger, she fights back, threatening to set Dinah on him if he does not leave her alone. The Caterpillar's aloof, superior attitude and his physically high placement on the mushroom set him in a dominant position over Alice despite the fact that he is only three inches high. The Hatter and the March Hare display their authority over Alice, despite their childish behavior at the tea table, with their quick wit and debate. The King of Hearts, submissive to his wife, is powerful in name only, and calls attention to his inadequacy while judging the Knave of Hearts. Alice's identity crisis is exacerbated by each relationship as she vacillates between powerless and powerful, culminating in a final temper tantrum – "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" – and an awakening from Wonderland. As she has no choice but to grow up, which she herself acknowledges, Carroll foreshadows further confusion in her life as a grown Victorian woman. Her identity as defined by her male relationships upholds the traditional standard of the time, but her reactions to this identity do not. By highlighting her power struggles to the point of absurdity, Carroll contests the repression she will undergo as she matures, but not enough to change it. If she continues in the life her sister envisions, that of calm domesticity, she will be forever subservient as the "weaker" sex and expected to be content with this position.

In Neverland, the situation is reversed. Rather than Wendy and Mrs. Darling struggling to define their place in reference to the male characters, the male characters define their positions of power in reference to them. Mr. Darling and Captain Hook symbolize both the successful and unsuccessful English gentleman. While Mr. Darling's behavior is silly and childish, it enables him to show his emotion and also endears him to

his wife and family. Hook, the “dark and sinister man,” is unable to garner the love and respect of Wendy or the boys, and dies devoid of his much-sought-after “good form” – the symbol of success and refinement in a well-bred Victorian male. Smee, though acting as surrogate mother toward his fellow pirates and scorned for his domestic skill, has “the best form of all.” He earns the respect of the children and knows nothing of his own power and influence, both of which make him a better man than the envious Hook. Mr. Darling’s paranoia that Nana – as the female nanny – does not respect him leads him to show bad form by banishing her from the house. He does, however, repent, which places him again in the position of “master of the house.” What may on one hand look like pathetic behavior is, in both London and Neverland, rewarded by affection and esteem from those whom Barrie places in high esteem: mothers and children. Barrie thus contests the image of the ideal Victorian male as a strong protector, a dependable provider, and a clever leader of his family. None of his male characters fit this stereotype. He chose to uphold the affectionate, boyish Mr. Darling, but to vanquish the strong, grown Hook while highlighting the silly idiosyncrasies of both. He does not reverse gender roles, but chooses the parts he likes and defeats the rest. Well-bred men must impress women who can recognize “good form,” but both know that this relationship can be accomplished by playacting. His women have the power to define men but not enough authority to contest that “father knows best” (140).

## Conclusion

“When a children’s story is good, its difference from an adult story is insignificant.”

-John Morgenstern, “Children and Other Talking Animals”

Peter Pan, the iconic figure of eternal childhood, is one of the few characters – certainly the only main character – in Barrie’s and Carroll’s stories who escapes the dual existence brought about by gender stereotypes. He does this out of sheer will and determination, as he is forever encouraged by other characters to fill additional roles: lover to Tink or Tiger Lily, traditional husband to Wendy, and traditional son to Mrs. Darling. He wishes for none of these labels but “always to be a little boy and have fun” (41-2). He is free from guilt, concern, responsibility, and fear of the future (a possible antithesis to Victorian motherhood) and his freedom from such concerns also suggests his triumph over the gender-specific struggles of the age. While Hook laments that no children love him, and Mr. Darling secretly wishes for his wife’s respect and Nana’s admiration, Peter’s own opinion of himself – signified by his signature “crow” – is sufficient. His one weakness in this sense is his desire for a mother, despite his hatred of grown-ups.

Peter’s place within the story further serves to highlight the maternal figures. He both defines them as mothers (his feelings are “those of a devoted son”) and is defined by them (he was “very much like [Mrs. Darling’s] kiss”); however, his lack of concern for these definitions render them meaningless. His existence is full of contradictions, but not the difficult or confusing gender expectations with which the other characters struggle.

He hates mothers, as they are grown-ups and “ruin everything,” but fights bravely to protect Wendy as her “devoted son.” He is a sexless young boy and, therefore, ignorant of Wendy, Tink, and Tiger Lily’s desire for him; yet, he also carelessly possesses the “good form” of a grown gentleman, which provokes envy in Hook. Even when Hook invites him to “kick instead of stab,” subsequently showing “bad form” during their final duel, he nevertheless emerges the hero who vanquished the tyrant of Neverland (209). Living completely in Neverland, Peter is untouched by the cultural concerns and constructs of the “real” world, and he chooses his contradictory existence. Thus, Peter Pan is irresistible to both genders: Mrs. Darling cannot speak ill of him and Hook cannot die until he one-ups him. He is neither male nor female to himself. As pure “youth” and “joy,” he is what Barrie wished to retain throughout his life and Carroll wished for Alice Liddell to maintain in adulthood.

This reverence and desire for childhood, possible influences for both authors, suggests why two male writers decided to enter into the female-dominated arena of “children’s fiction.” According to Rowbotham, “Generally, authors used the device of presenting to their readership by incorporating into their stories a much wider picture of society than was necessary for the more easily satisfied male, so that girls could see the pivotal nature of their role” (8). This is more obvious in Barrie’s work than in Carroll’s, but, even more interestingly, these works of didactic fiction were usually written by female authors (9). Yet Carroll’s and Barrie’s strongest relationships are tied to the domestic sphere, not to the public sphere of male dominance or to adult sexual relationships with females. Carroll’s social awkwardness, his admiration for little girls, and his belief, according to Jacqueline Rose, that growth and sexual maturity ruin a

child's perfect and "exact knowledge of the world" caused him to lament the impending adolescence of his favorite person: Alice Liddell (8). Also, his experience in caring for his sisters after the death of his mother gave him more of an appreciation for their feminine world than most men would have been privy to.

As for Barrie, his guardianship of Sylvia Llewelyn Davies' four sons after her death in 1910 symbolized his rebirth within the child-world. According to Wullschläger, "Barrie's life was transformed: from an unhappily married oddball looking into other lives, he became a single, boyish man in charge of five lost boys – as close to a live, adult version of Peter as could be imagined" (135). He was working on the novel version of *Peter and Wendy* at the time (published in 1911), and this transformation could have inspired the expansion of the Neverland story. As Carroll's and Barrie's female relationships were usually with mothers and young girls, their works reflected what they knew and cared for most, giving them the ability to speak specifically to such an audience. Their treatment of the male characters does show insight into, and even a forgiveness for, their multiple flaws, but they are most often depicted by how their behavior affects the heroines. By creating these girl-characters in fantastic settings, both authors made an appeal to their audience to become (or avoid becoming) what seemed inevitable: adult females. By doing so, they also displayed how motherhood affected their own realities and, perhaps subconsciously, what they wanted to sustain or change.

Carroll highlights the absurdities Alice must endure in her grown life, though she has no power to stop herself from growing up. The ending scene of the story, her sister's dream, reflects Carroll's hope that by remembering her childhood she will avoid becoming the monstrous creatures she meets in Wonderland; yet, she is only able to

escape by mirroring Wonderland's aggression. Carroll is willing to contest the absurdity of her future role, showing only frightening images of adulthood, but reluctantly admits that it is unavoidable. Wendy, who wishes to become like her mother, patterns her Neverland after her assumed domestic future. Yet, she also wishes for romantic adventures with Peter, who cannot fulfill them. Upon returning to London, she grows out of her ability to visit the real Neverland and grows into her role as matriarch. She is able to continue to care for Peter through her daughters and granddaughters, an ability Barrie both honors and laments: "she was a grown woman smiling at it all, but they were wet smiles" (239). As motherhood is the superior role in *Peter Pan*, Barrie gives her the ability to remember Neverland without the necessity of stunted growth; she is also able to experience the joys of adulthood and motherhood.

In order for Mr. Darling, a male character, to "revisit" childhood, he must either act childish in London (crowing with the Lost Boys and refusing to take his medicine) or assume the evil pirate captain persona of Captain Hook in Neverland. Once boys grow up and take on the responsibilities of the public sphere, they are "done for." Only by acting silly and juvenile does Barrie give them a way out, for even though Mr. Darling cares for stocks, shares, and the opinion of his neighbors, his playful relationship with his family is more important. His dark counterpart, however, has no hope for redemption; in Hook's attempts to achieve "good form" and female respect, he has lost his connection to childhood and is as "done for" as the Lost Boys will be after they grow up. Therefore Barrie suggests that the strong, Victorian male cannot exist happily without being, even momentarily, "gay and innocent and heartless" – Wordsworth's "Child" is also the "Man."

The difficult realities of motherhood in any age of human history often necessitate an escapist “fairy story” to, in Forster’s words, “justify [its] own existence” (146). However, the oppressive expectations of Victorian women, girls and mothers, and the general hardship of daily life during the nineteenth century would have created a welcome environment for such outlets. *Alice* and *Peter* both offer this imaginative element, but they also give insight into the struggles, frustrations, and joys of the girls who had no choice but to grow up.

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