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The Gothic Ghost Story of Peter Pan

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Preface and acknowledgements

The idea of writing about Peter Pan came to me when I was thinking about English children's movies I enjoyed watching when I was younger. I watched the 2003 movie *Peter Pan* numerous times and, thinking back, there was something about the story that felt rather uncanny to me. When I explored this further, I found that the fairy tale of the charming Peter Pan and the picturesque Neverland had quite the backstory and I was rather intrigued to read about all the theories about Peter Pan being a ghost who killed children by taking them away to Neverland. There was always a bad gut-feeling concerning the kidnapping, the scary mermaids who can drown you at any moment and the vengeful pirates whose only mission in life is to kill you, which ached to be explored.

While exploring this thrilling ghost story, I have been able to get some precious time to myself. Writing this thesis while on maternity leave has not been easy, but indulging in the mystery of Peter Pan and the Victorian ghost story has certainly added to my multitasking skills and sparked my interest in dark children's literature.

I would firstly like to thank my supervisor Sonya for providing me the best guidance from the start. Your presence made sure I was never second-guessing myself. Furthermore, I want to dedicate this thesis to all the parents in my life. Both my own parents, my stepmother and my parents-in law have showed me tremendous love these months by taking on babysitting duties. Not only have you made sure that my whole heart has been taken care of, but you also made me feel like I could truly enjoy my academic work in solitude. I could never have done this without you and there are not nearly enough ways for me to thank you.

I also want to send my love to my partner for making me a mother and giving me the greatest gift in life. Writing a thesis whilst at home with a tiny human has truly been a reminder to treasure the little moments you get with your children and, if anything, there was never a bigger or more important reason to do this than doing it for my son.

To my son, Ulrik

*I truly look forward to reading you bedtime stories in a few years,
but I might just leave out the one about the lost children and the vengeful pirates.*

Introduction

The discussion I am going to venture into in my bachelor thesis concerns a theory amongst scholars that the story of Peter Pan, created by James Matthew Barrie (J.M. Barrie), could be read as a gothic ghost story. The main arguments that are typically made about this idea scrutinize the various levels of ambiguity and liminality in the character of Peter Pan and the recurrent themes of death, fear and grief in the text. Among the critique made by scholars, we find that the sinister themes of this story are mediated through “the lost child” (Dunnigan 162) and that Peter Pan serves as the gothic trope of “the ghost who is not conscious of his death and keeps interacting with others as if he were alive” (Fernández and Corcuera 2). There is also a subdiscussion of the text’s placement in the gothic ghost story genre, concerning the context of the tragic events in J.M. Barrie’s personal life and how it affected his authorship, which I think is interesting to explore to further emphasize the understanding of a gothic reading of the ghost of Peter Pan. Scott Brewster writes about the tendency of ghosts in Victorian literature being written as “metaphors or ciphers for ‘a spectrum of social anxieties of the day’” (Brewster 224), whereas some of these anxieties could concern the awareness of one’s own mortality as a result of becoming aware of others spirits (Smith 157). This could substantiate the common notion of Barrie’s trials in life affecting his creation of Peter Pan and Peter Pan’s character giving voice to Barrie’s deepest concerns (Fernández and Corcuera 1). Furthermore, the anxieties of the Victorian era could include the confrontation of child mortality, which Barrie himself experienced in his family at quite a young age, and coming to terms with an experience that was quite intimate in most Victorian families (Dunnigan 164). Odds are that, upon familiarizing ourselves with the story of Peter Pan as children, we might not have given any thought to the importance of the ghostly presence in this cherished children’s story. The common perception of Peter Pan’s character as the playful and innocent child who did not want to grow up can be challenged by the idea that he is a misunderstood and ignorant child imprisoned by his inability to grow up (Gilead 285). A gothic reading of *Peter and Wendy* could indicate that the nonchalant facade of Peter Pan could disguise a much darker story of an unconscious ghost restlessly roaming a realm in the afterlife, possessing transcendental qualities and eternal youth, but lacking human empathy.

To better understand how the tragic events of J.M. Barrie’s life pervaded his work and inspired the ghostly presence in Peter Pan, we need to look at how people perceived death in Victorian England. The prevalence of death, and especially child mortality, was thought to be something the Victorians were quite accustomed to in their daily life. Carol Christ states that

death was “a common domestic fact of life for Victorians” because of high mortality rates. For instance, the average life span for an upper-class male in the mid-19th century was 44 years old and fifty-seven of every hundred children in working-class families were dead by five years of age (Christ 2000). The frequency of death, both in adults and children, was undeniably the reason why Victorians had such an honest understanding of grief in the 19th century. This understanding opened up a representation of death in Victorian gothic literature, which was based on subjectivity to death. In “The Victorian Gothic”, Andrew Smith writes of how the end of the century marked an emergence of ideas about death, concerning the separation of “sustainable inner life and the corrupted and finite physical body”. These separated ideas could further be addressed in literature by the use of ghostliness, which was seen as an aspect of introspection (Smith 156). Altogether, the normality of death in the Victorian era opened an introspective discourse, in which the Victorians directed their focus on their own mental and emotional processing of death instead of the physical aspect of death. By separating the psychological self from the physical self, the notion of death became quite a common substratum in Victorian gothic literature. As the Victorians started experiencing new anxiety towards death and dying, they were concerned with haunting thoughts that the living may be dead or that the living are haunted by the dead (Smith 156), hereby introducing the Victorian ghost story.

The thoughts of the living and haunted dead set the tone for the Victorian ghost story that developed during the nineteenth century, which manifested that “...the technological advances of the time were no defence against the terrifying and inexplicable.” (Freeman 93). As opposed to gothic fiction from the late sixteenth century, where the purpose of the ghost was primarily to frighten and horrify, gothic fiction in the nineteenth century introduced ghostly figures whose purpose was to teach us moral lessons (Freeman 94). This is further emphasized by Vigen Guroian in the introduction to *Ancestral Shadows*, who writes of how Russell Kirk was told that a “good ghost story must have for its kernel some clear premise about the character of human existence” (ix). Therefore, Victorian gothic literature focused on internal psychological disturbance, and by including the motif of ghost, the ghost story became an embodiment of an obsession with fears of the past, granting us “momentary, haunting glimpses of the forgotten, hidden and excluded.” (Brewster 245). Kirk also makes a point about the purpose of his later stories about life and death being a tool to help improve our lives on earth and how we care for ourselves and other souls, rather than an attempt to resolve what happens in life after death (Guroian ix). Consequently, the gothic reading of

Peter Pan can be seen as the ultimate gothic fairy tale, due to its “ambiguously celebratory desire to recover the dead and the vanished” (Dunnigan 165).

The dark substratum of Victorian gothic literature could imply that J.M. Barrie used the character of Peter Pan to give voice to his concerns about the relationship between childhood and death (Fernández and Corcuera 1). Barrie had his first encounter with death at the age of six years when his elder brother David died in an ice-skating accident and left his mother devastated, only consoled by the notion that her boy would remain young forever. It is discussed among critics whether this incident was the primary reason why the notion of everlasting childhood stayed with Barrie throughout his life, but it is also a possibility that later events contributed to the apparent subtle obsession with death and children. In 1898, he met the Llewelyn Davies family in Kensington Gardens, with whom he eventually developed a strong friendship. The family consisted of three boys at the time, all under the age of five, and there were to be two more boys as the years went by, all of which Barrie formed a strong relationship with, humouring them with stories about pirates and fairies and entertaining them in a childlike manner. Later, when the Llewelyn Davies boys lost both their parents to cancer, Barrie grasped the opportunity to become their guardian and continued to nurture them as if they were his own children. Sadly, tragedy struck Barrie again, firstly when George, the oldest of the five boys, died in the First World War and secondly when Michael, the fourth of the five boys, drowned in a river. According to the youngest brother, Nico, George and Michael were said to be the boys that meant the most to Barrie, hence why their sudden deaths, at such a young age, inspired his writing of the everlasting character of Peter Pan (Birkin 2003).

To engage in the discussion of a gothic ghost story reading of Peter Pan, we need to establish the characteristics of Peter Pan’s character while juxtaposing the context regarding J.M. Barrie’s creation of Peter Pan and the notions of death in the Victorian era. The story of Peter Pan has been showcased in both theatre and various prose texts, but I will conduct this thesis by analysing passages from the 1911 novel *Peter and Wendy*. I will explore these passages under the scope of the uncanny ghost, meanwhile establishing the framework of the Victorian gothic ghost story and looking into how the writer of the novel, J.M. Barrie, was inspired by the bereavement in his life whilst creating the ambiguous character of Peter Pan. By analysing the complexity and ambiguity of Peter Pan’s character and the Victorian anxieties about death, we can establish the novel as a display of a gothic ghost story.

The Evolving Ghost of Peter Pan

The origin story

In *Peter and Wendy*, the origin story of how Peter Pan became the boy who did not want to grow up, begins with the repression of adulthood. When Peter was born, he overheard his parents talking about what he was to become when he grew older and decided to run away in an instant. Therefore, he does not know how old he is, but he knows this: “I don’t ever want to be a man” and “I want always to be a little boy and to have fun.” (Barrie 162). He takes the shape of eternal childhood to “alleviate the intolerable burden of adult existence” (Gilead 285) and ventures on a symbolic flight from reality. From birth, Peter Pan becomes an embodiment of the adult obsession with time and death, further underlining the concerns about death and dying, which seemed to haunt the Victorians (Smith and Hughes 7).

As the little boy flees the reality of adult responsibilities and runs off to live among the fairies in Kensington Gardens, he becomes a ghost in the eyes of his mother, who now is face to face with a haunting issue in Victorian families: the loss of a child. When Wendy tells the boys about a mother’s love and how she will always wait for her children, Peter recounts the sorrowful moment he realized he had become a ghost from the past. After refusing to grow up and running away, he returns home from Kensington Gardens after a long time, only to realize that “... the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed.” (Barrie 226). This could mark the point of no return, where his mother has moved on because she knows her son is dead, and Peter decides to escape into an idealized fantasy land where he can remain an eternal child in denial of his own death (Fernández and Corcuera 2). According to Gilead, “The fear of death becomes a death wish” when he decides to escape the reality of adulthood as a reaction to his fear of growing up (Gilead 286). Essentially, this proves how Peter’s fear of ageing becomes the cause of his imminent ghostly transformation.

The recurrence of the ghost in Peter Pan’s character is also closely accompanied by the motif of the Lost Boys. The Lost Boys are “the children who fall out of their perambulators when the nurse is looking the other way” (Barrie 164) and could also be the children we hear about in the odd stories of Peter Pan, “as that when children died he went part of the way with them, so that they should not be frightened” (Barrie 147). Upon realizing that he has been replaced and forgotten by his mother, Peter becomes the advocate for all children who are victims, and escapees, from adult reality and parental neglect (Gilead 286). He regards

himself as the captain of the escape to Neverland and leads the way when other neglected children join him in the afterlife. The common denominator of Peter Pan and the Lost Boys is therefore the sense of uprooted homeliness, which according to Nicholas Royle is the uncanny “revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home” (Royle 1). This could conclude the gothic reading of the text where ill-fated children suffer an ironic death and evolve into uncanny ghosts of the past.

The charming introduction

Before Peter Pan is unveiled to the Darlings, Wendy explains to Mrs. Darling how she thought that Peter sometimes entered the nursery at night and sat at the edge of her bed while playing on his pipes (Barrie 148). The coming of Peter at night in the children’s bedroom is a classical ghost story trope. In the words of scholar Nick Freeman, the increasingly literate nineteenth-century Britain saw a rise to bedtime reading and “transformed the bedroom from the traditional place of safety and repose into a site of unrest and horror” (Freeman 95). Not only does Peter cross physical boundaries and enter the nursery without knocking, but his entering through the window is, according to Dunnigan, “a visual motif reminiscent of the popular spectral hands of the Victorian ghost story” (Dunnigan 162). Peter is at last the haunter at the window and acts as a trigger to an increasingly deep maternal anxiety, which is reflected when Michael asks Mrs. Darling; “Can anything harm us, mother, after the night-lights are lit?” and she responds “Nothing, precious. They are the eyes a mother leaves behind her to guard her children.” (Barrie 165). Nevertheless, Mrs. Darling is completely oblivious to the fact that the nursery in which she sends her dainty children to sleep is soon about to become the room where she will sit longingly and wait for her children’s return. This trope could emphasize how gothic literature gives voice to the fear of failure in our responsibilities toward our family and can also be viewed as a reflection of the mortifying child mortality rates mentioned in the introduction, where a frightening number of children did not even make it to the age of six (Christ 2000). According to Carol Christ, we are shielded from this terrifying matter in modern times because most deaths happen in hospitals, meanwhile, in the Victorian era the deaths took place at home, which could indicate that the spookiest and most terrifying matters take place inside the four walls of your own home.

Furthermore, as the Darlings are introduced to the charming and endearing Peter Pan, we discover that his physical character is rather peculiar. After already establishing his being as a liminal creature, being able to transcend physical boundaries by entering windows without permission, we learn of his oddly youthful appearance. The first time Mrs. Darling

sees Peter Pan, he is dressed in “skeleton leaves and the juices that ooze out of trees” (Barrie 149). We also learn that he still inhabits his first set of teeth and has his first laugh (Barrie 163), which is looked upon as “the loveliest of gurgles”. Peter Pan takes the physical shape of a child who is forever young and becomes an emblem of eternal childhood. The inhabitancy of the physical traits of a child could indicate that he is the result of child mortality, a human soul forever embedded in the body of his child self. Altogether, the wooden juices and skeleton leaves and the childlike facial features seem to be the embodiment of an eternal boy, but also a rotting corpse. This correlates with Royle’s uncanniness where there is an uncertain sense of something that is both beautiful and frightening and with a flickering of the supernatural (Royle 2). Peter’s uncanny figure constitutes him as “a dream of immortality come true but also like a plague deadly to children” because much like aging and death, he empties the nursery and leaves the parents in bereavement (Gilead 286). The ambiguity of Peter’s ghost, reflected in his elusive innocence and unsettling liminality, leaves us under the impression that there are several layers to be unpeeled in the discovery of this gothic reading.

To further illustrate the peculiar ghostliness of Peter Pan, his mystical presence is looked upon as something that creates a disturbance in the novel’s atmosphere. At the beginning of the novel, Barrie writes about how the Darlings appear as the perfect Victorian family and explains how “there never was a simpler, happier family until the coming of Peter Pan.” (Barrie 145). One could interpret this as a way of saying that the ghost of Peter Pan, while abducting the children to Neverland, destroys the perfect picture of a happy family, leaving the parents thinking that their children are lost. On their flying venture to Neverland, the Darling children discover that Peter could “sleep in the air without falling, by merely laying on his back and floating,” and that “he was so light that if you got behind him and blew he went faster” (Barrie 172) and upon the arrival to Neverland, it is also mentioned how “in his absence things are usually quiet” and that if you put your ear to the ground as he returns, “you would hear the whole island seething with life” (Barrie 180). All of the above proves the ghostliness of Peter Pan, from the absence of weight to the disturbance of the safe and homely.

Lastly, there is also an aspect of Peter Pan’s ghostliness which is based on the identification with a swallow. The swallow is a bird which in Celtic mythology is associated with death and the ability to transcend to other worlds through flight. The fundamentals of the story of Peter Pan are based on a convergence of classic and Celtic mythology, which is overall quite evident in the works of J.M. Barrie due to his Scottish roots. Scholars argue that Peter Pan is a dead child who, as opposed to other dead children, has not been completely

transformed into a swallow, hereby leaving him a ghost trapped between two realms: Neverland and London (Fernández and Corcuera 2). The entrapment between different realms could speak to the fact that Peter is unaware of his own death and does not accept it, meanwhile interacting with others as if he were still alive. Peter asks Wendy about swallows while talking about Mrs Darling's lovely stories: "Do you know why swallows build in the eaves of houses? It is to listen to the stories" (Barrie 165) and hereby identifies himself with a swallow because he is lurking by the nursery window at night to listen to Mrs Darling stories. It is worth mentioning that the identification with birds is a prevalent trope in Victorian literature, also seen in Charlotte Brönte's *Jane Eyre*, where the titular protagonist identifies with a caged bird, symbolizing the expectations that Victorian society placed on women (Anderson 12). Much like *Jane Eyre*, Peter Pan finds that society's expectations of him are all-consuming. The identification with a bird in Peter Pan's case could explain how Peter fleeing the nursery by flight was a reaction to the fear of having his wings clipped by the responsibilities of adulthood.

The failed transformation

As mentioned in the introduction, ghosts from the nineteenth-century Gothic had for main purpose of teaching us moral lessons, and considering the question of death itself was considered a normality in the Victorian era, the ghost of Peter Pan could have an introspective effect on us and lead us to understand something about how we cope with the loss of life. As Peter Pan ventures on his regular path and brings the Darling children to Neverland to join him on his adventures, we are witnessing an incipient transformation. From the beginning of the novel, Peter is singled out as "the special one", with Barrie writing that "All children, except one, grow up." (Barrie 143). In this case, he is the odd one out, unable to chase the opportunities presented to you when you grow up. The disparity between Peter Pan and other children is also emphasized when Wendy realizes that she must grow up and that "You always know after you are two" because "Two is the beginning of the end." (Barrie 143) and, as mentioned earlier, Peter ran away the day he was born to escape this notion. While other children have no other choice than to grow up, they also use growth as an opportunity, meanwhile, Peter does not only want to grow up, but he is physically unable to, hereby leaving him "lonely and stranded" (Connelly 2).

During the whole of the novel, Peter is also described as possessing several problematic personality traits which further singles him out. He is extremely conceited, in fact, "there never was a cockier boy" (Barrie 161), and forgetful to the point that he struggles

to remember his adventures (Barrie 200), and most importantly he is of explicitly violent nature. The narcissism, forgetfulness, and violence are character flaws that prove his character incapable of love and empathy, working as a stagnation in the advancement of his character (Connelly 3). Consequently, Peter's staggering development proves his ghostly presence as dangerous. Tootles, one of The Lost Boys, says he is "so afraid of Peter" (Barrie 189), presumably because of Peter's impulsivity, which is also illustrated when Peter always waits until the last moment to save John and Michael (Barrie 171). In other words, Peter is not only a possessor of immortality but also possesses emotional flaws which prevent his character from developing, hereby deeming him incapable of both emotional and physical growth.

Moreover, as the Darling children and the Lost Boys return home and return to reality where growing up is a certainty, Peter is "entrapped in an eternal present without emotional or cognitive meaning" (Gilead 287). Being a ghost, he is living an "inhuman life without morals and values" (Connelly 4) and his forgetful and violent nature leads to a lack of humanity. His lack of humanity is evident when Peter talks about killing a pirate who is sleeping: "I would wake him first, and then kill him. That's the way I always do." (Barrie 176) and when he is asked if he kills many, he replies "Tons." His days as a careless ghost roaming the deathly realm of Neverland and indulging in dangerous and soon-to-be-forgotten adventures could embody the absence or loss of childhood (Gilead 285), which likely stems from the rejection of maternal love that Peter experienced when he found that his mother had shut the window on him upon his return home.

As a result of Peter experiencing rejection from his mother, he struggles with a fear of abandonment which he tries to avoid by always staying occupied and going on new adventures (Connelly 5). Therefore, adventures were of daily occurrence for Peter, but when he comes back, he often forgets about them completely (Barrie 200), which essentially leaves him stuck in a never-ending circle of atrocious and callow shenanigans. Still, it is the fear of abandonment, an unresolved feeling from deep within, which leaves him unable to develop compassion and understanding of human life (Connelly 2). Peter views those who have returned to reality as "grown up and done for" (Barrie 271), meanwhile, he is stuck in a weaponized childhood where reckless fun is the only motive (Connelly 4).

Peter Pan's character might be perceived as witty and nonchalant and capable of looking past nonsense, however, he is also heavily burdened by the sorrows and griefs of his lost childhood. Peter's hidden loneliness and unhappiness give him nightmares which are "more painful than the dreams of other boys" (Barrie 238) and he finds himself unable to separate from them because they have to do with "the riddle of his existence". Even after

killing Hook at the end of the novel, he has one of his nightmares which has him crying in his sleep for a long time (Barrie 258). The unbearable dreams prove that despite Peter's efforts to forget and escape, something in his subconsciousness tells him that his life is missing the love of a family or perhaps the love of a mother. In fact, when Peter Pan wants Wendy and her brothers to join him on the adventure to Neverland, he convinces her by stating that he and the Lost Boys are lonely and in need of a mother who will tell them stories and tuck them in at night (Barrie 166). Wendy also feels like she is in "the presence of tragedy" when she realizes Peter does not have a mother, nor does he have the slightest desire to have one (Barrie 160). When Peter brings Wendy back to Neverland to nurture him and the Lost Boys, he reconstitutes his need for maternal love and temporarily subdues the conventional reality of adulthood.

After surrendering to a little play pretend of mother and father with Wendy and the Lost Boys, Peter gets a taste of the adulthood he has repressed so intently. At this point in the novel, one could argue that Peter's sympathy for others is evolving and that he is starting to warm up to the idea of being loved by a family. Still, his anxiety about growing up still lingers and so when Wendy and her brothers decide to return home and she offers Peter and the Lost Boys an invitation to join the Darling family, he rejects her offer of a sense of belonging and prioritizes superficial happiness (Connelly 6). Still, the climax of Peter's character arc is not demonstrated until the Darling's return home, when he initially shuts the window of the nursery in a selfish manner, only to change his mind and leave it open so the others can return to the safe embrace of their mothers and fathers and have a chance of happiness, even though this happiness is unattainable for him (7). Consequently, Peter evolves into a ghost with heightened morality, which surpasses the terrible forgetfulness and the brutal violence, but still fails to fully transform as he rejects the salvation that is offered to him (6) and rather continues to live his hasty and hollow life.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, a good ghost story needs to have at its core a distinct idea about what it means to be human. In fact, Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argue that the motif of the ghost is fundamental to our thoughts about humans because to be human is to have a spirit and the spirit could be perceived as “an entity not alive but also not quite, not finally, dead” which haunts us. There is also a paradoxical aspect to the existence of ghosts since they are “fundamental to the human, fundamentally human, and a denial or disturbance of the human, the very being of the inhuman” (Bennett and Royle 237). This is the case with the ambiguous story of Peter Pan, the ghost child who is oblivious to his own deathly wander and is on a mission to avoid the confrontation of his repressed fears.

As we follow the ghost of Peter Pan, from initially being abandoned by maternal love to the final rejection of humanity, we are essentially witnessing how J.M. Barrie makes light of the normality of death in the Victorian era. As we know, he suffered a great deal of losses throughout his life, and even though we have established the Victorians as accustomed to high death rates, there was still a matter of dealing with the emotional damage the loss of a loved one brings. Therefore, Barrie’s writing reflects on the process of mourning a loss (Dunnigan 165), to which there is no final answer. According to Bennett and Royle, everyone experiences loss, but every loss is also unique, therefore it is not rare to encounter the loss of another which might feel like the end of the world (Bennett and Royle 135).

In the discussion of what inspired the creation of Peter Pan, Barrie’s relationship with the Llewelyn Davies boys is often mentioned, but Andrew Birkin states that the real genesis lay in Barrie’s childhood (Birkin 2003). Barrie was only a little boy when he experienced the tragedy of loss up close, which in itself is a harrowing event, in addition, his mother did not cope very well with the loss of his elder brother, which sadly ended in Barrie feeling neglected by his mother. It is said that he lived in his brother’s shadow all his life, due to him and his brother being the only boys living at home at the time, and therefore Barrie’s reaction to his brother’s death led him to an attempt to replace the memory of him. Moreover, Barrie wrote that despite his attempts to console his mother, she could not overcome his brother’s death, because while Barrie became a man, his brother was still a thirteen-year-old boy (Birkin 2003). As a result, the loss of his brother had a huge impact on Barrie’s perception of death and grief. After witnessing how his mother struggled to cope with the loss of a child, he realized the importance of the notion that his brother would live forever despite his death – only now he would remain an eternal young boy. The consolation of this notion might have

resulted in Barrie's creation of the boy who could not grow up and who instead lived on to experience the thrills and adventures of the afterlife.

The gothic ghost story of Peter Pan has an effect on us that inflects "the trope of the resurrected past" (Dunnigan 165) in a layered exposure of longing and nostalgia. Throughout the whole of the novel, Peter is presented as a seemingly cheeky and feisty character who is on an endless hunt for future adventures, but in fact, he is constantly on the run from the past, which, after the arrival of the Darling children, is now starting to catch up to him. Though he is not aware of it, his lust and desire for violent and cheap thrills is a result of his attempt to avoid the bad nightmares and the repressed feelings of a lost childhood. The nightmares, which are said to be about the riddle of his existence, leave Peter yearning for something he knows is unattainable. After exploring the subdiscussion of Barrie's life pervading his literary work, we could interpret the runaway ghost of Peter Pan as Barrie's lost childhood, which evaporated in front of his eyes after the death of his brother and the following neglect by his mother. The creation of a ghost who tries to flee his haunting past and fears the unknown future could be a way to comprehend the mourning of his own lost childhood.

As for the ghost's failure to accept his own death and interact with others as if he were alive, it could also be a reflection of how the Victorians dealt with the topic of death as a part of everyday life. The Victorians might have been accustomed to seeing their loved ones on their deathbeds, but as stated before, each loss is unique, therefore you could never really know beforehand what the mourning process would look like. When Peter returns to his nursery window, only to find he has been replaced by another boy, we find that his mother represents the Victorian ideal of mourning. As stated by Peter, "he stayed away for moons and moons and moons" (Barrie 226), which in this case was long enough for his mother to realize that her son was dead and not coming back. Representing Victorian ideas about grief, Peter's mother honoured his memory by proceeding with her life and having another son, which is a natural reaction when you are living in a time of high rates of child mortality. On the other hand, we know that Mrs Darling never lost hope of seeing her children again, she kept the window open at all times and the beds aired in case they were to return. In opposition to the Victorian mourning ideals, Mrs Darling represents a mother who is unable to both accept her loss and fully embrace the grief, instead, she is mentally living in a reality where her children will return at last. As different as Peter's mother and Mrs Darling may be, they both represent an introspective mourning process, where they act on their grief according to their own thoughts and feelings about death.

It is apparent that the ghost of Peter Pan is concealing a dark truth about the context it emerged from. J.M. Barrie's encounters with death in an era where death was considered a normality resulted in a novel where lost souls get another chance at life. As a way of dealing with Barrie's numerous losses, he created a character and a realm that would immortalize his deceased loved ones and depict the loss of his childhood. To conclude, we could say that Peter Pan, the ghost who escapes his responsibilities by flight and fluctuates between violent adventures and bad nightmares, is an embodiment of both Barrie's and the Victorians' handling of death and alternatively a memento for the people Barrie lost in his life. Nevertheless, Peter's failure to embrace his own ghostly existence and accept the ways of redemption that are offered to him could tell us that Barrie thinks of death as inevitable. Still, just because something is inevitable does not mean that we are always prepared for it, so if to die is an awfully big adventure, then writing a charming and alluring ghost story about the adventure is quite a clever way to deal with loss and death.

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