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*Peter Pan and Freud*

An Analysis of the Freudian Tripartite Psyche

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Introduction

It has been more than 120 years since James Matthew Barrie met with the five Llewelyn Davies boys at Kensington Gardens, and befriended them and their parents. From that fortunate and unexpected meeting, Barrie developed his first idea of Peter Pan, the boy who lived with the fairies and did not want to grow up. Behind the creation of Peter Pan, however, there is not only this event: when Barrie was only six years old, in fact, his older brother David died as a result of injuries suffered in a fall while ice skating. His mother, Margaret, suffered so deeply the loss of her older son that Barrie, to comfort her, started to wear his brother’s clothes and to imitate his particular way of whistling. James went on imitating his brother until he turned fourteen years old, the age David was when he died: after that day, he stopped imitating him, and started to be himself again. The death of David and his perpetual state as child is commonly viewed as one of the influences in Barrie’s invention of Peter. The creation of Peter Pan inspired, and still does, the imagination of both youths and adults: the book is still relevant in today’s popular culture, while new films and adaptations of the novel continue to come into our daily lives in both book, film, and TV-series format – the latest film based on the novel, Pan, was released in 2015, and there is an animated series for children called Jake and the Never Land Pirates released by Disney Channel.

Peter has a personality in which the human being can easily recognize itself, and as a matter of fact the figure of the faery child became an ideal model to use in the field of psychology to identify a certain kind of behavioural pattern in adults, which took the name of The Peter Pan Syndrome. This syndrome is a disorder in which a person, usually a man, is unable to grow into mental maturity: the person afflicted by this disorder is not able to take responsibility for their own actions, and
also they are not capable of taking care of themselves or others, as they have great difficulties to build genuine relationships with other people (Kidd 82-93). Kenneth
Kidd, a literary critic in both children’s literature studies and psychology, contends in his book *Freud in Oz* (2011) that the popularity of Peter Pan depends mostly on the fact that “it resonated with an existing fantasy of escape from ‘civilization’, or adulthood, marriage and polite society” (Kidd 84). The author links this syndrome to the character of Barrie more than to Peter himself, pointing out how even the creator of the eternal child was unable to grow up due to his traumatic childhood: according to Kidd, what Barrie describes throughout the adventures of *Peter Pan* are neither entertainment stories for the Llewelyn Davies boys nor a description of the adventures of the same boys, but the childhood he could never have.

The Peter Pan Syndrome is just one of the several transpositions of this novel into the areas of psychoanalysis. Several other psychoanalytical theories have been previously applied to the novel of *Peter Pan*, the most popular being the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud, and particularly his theory of the Ego and the Id. Sigmund Freud is considered by many the father of psychoanalysis: he formulated several theories, including infantile sexuality – the most famous theory being the Oedipus Complex –, repression, sublimation, and also explored the structure of the mind by formulating the tripartite model of the psyche – ego, super-ego, and id –, the structure of the unconscious, and developed a treatment for the mental issues of his patients. In his work *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud explains how the human mind works and how its psyche is divided; instead of using the two-part model of the psyche that was largely utilized at that time, he formulates that the human mind is divided into three connected parts: the Ego – i.e. the consciousness, and the part with which a person is most in contact –, the Super-ego – i.e. the
conscience, and the part of the mind that is defined by social and parental authority –, and the Id – i.e. the unconscious mind, the primitive and instinctive component of personality.

Several studies have connected Peter Pan with many of Freud’s main concepts, among them the tripartite psyche model and the Oedipus complex. Michael Egan, in his “The Neverland of Id” (1982), points out how Neverland could resemble “a poetic version of the Freudian id” (Egan 44), and also emphasises the role of Mrs Darling as the maternal superego (43). The work that Egan accomplished was useful to the subsequent generations of scholars, because he was one of the first to provide significant elements of connection between Neverland and the Id of the children, children being both those described in the novel and those living in the real world. His work is also relevant because he takes into account both the original play and the novel, and not only the latter as many other scholars do. Furthermore, Egan considers and underlines the importance of Barrie’s vision of himself: as he reports, Barrie usually talked about having a divided personality, one defined as more calm and quiet which characterises his first part of his works, and another more unruly, darker and more sinister which emerged after the paralysis of his right hand, forcing Barrie to write with his left hand (Egan 38-40).

Egan’s analysis paved the way for other critics to analyse Barrie’s work through the prism of Freudian psychoanalysis. Nell Boulton, in her “Peter Pan and the Flight from Reality” (2006), preferred to connect Barrie’s novel not just with the Freudian unconscious, but mostly with Freud’s concept of narcissism which, according to her, both the ethereal boy and the author himself embody. Narcissism is defined as an extreme love for oneself, and usually narcissistic people interact with others but are not able to form social bonds with them (Boulton 310). She observes
how both Peter and Barrie were, in a certain way, estranged from their mother’s side — Peter because he flew away and was replaced by another baby, and Barrie because of his decision to impersonate his own brother during his childhood. The narcissistic side of both characters emerges when both look for a motherly figure, but not a sexual partner, and rather they both seem to reject the sexual experience — Peter chooses Wendy to be his mother, and even if he pretends in play to be her husband he is unable to understand what Wendy really wants from him; Barrie marries Mary Ansell in 1894, but several biographies report that their marriage was never consummated.

Sexual negation and avoidance of adulthood are the main themes of Mary Grytcko’s study of the novel, entitled “The Romance in the Nursery” (2016). In her article, Grytcko argues that characters such as Peter search for death as an escape from the condition in which the Victorian society wanted them to be: by dying, or by escaping to Neverland — which by many is seen as afterworld —, Peter avoids not just growing up, but all the things to which this state is related, such as sex and reproduction. She also remarks upon the importance of the fact that, in the first draft of Barrie’s theatrical play of Peter Pan — i.e. 1904 —, the character of Peter is never touched by any other character, and that when Wendy tries to hug him he draws back as if he is repelled by contact with her (Grytcko 149), and that it is only in the first draft of the novel — i.e. 1911 — that the author made his character touchable. However, even if Peter kisses and hugs Wendy in the novel, he still refuses to and is not able to understand what these “queer” girls want from him (Barrie 87). The members of Neverland, she continues, are unable to form any kind of relationship that could bring the island out of its frozen non-reproductive time; therefore, they are
blessed but at the same time damned to live in this perpetual enchanted and queer island (150).

Also important for this thesis is Bruno Bettelheim’s “Psychoanalysis and Education” (1969), which is a proposal for both psychoanalysts and educators to work together for the sake of children’s mental health. Bettelheim uses Freud’s theory of the Ego-Super-ego-Id and incorporates it in the educators’ work. By doing so, he hopes to help educators to lay the foundation for children to develop a balance between Id and Super-ego. Bettelheim’s opinion is that educators focus too much on the treatment of the Id and its needs instead of helping the child developing a balanced Ego; therefore, he stresses the importance of the Ego and how it should be strengthened. This work was used to better understand the development of the Ego of the children in the novel.

“The Origin of Morality” (2016) by Coline Covington is an article that tries to explain how a sense of internal morality and conscience develops in an individual, underlining how important the contact between the mother and the child is during the first months of the baby’s life; she also describes how this contact helps the child to develop empathy, which is important for the individual in order to understand the world around him- or herself. This article was used to better understand the figure of Peter Pan and his inability to form neither a balanced ego nor a super-ego.

Despite the numerous studies carried out on Peter Pan through the application of psychoanalytical concepts, while reading these materials it is possible to notice how the majority of these focus their attention on a limited number of characters in the novel – namely Peter Pan and Mrs Darling –, as it is possible to notice in the article cited above by Egan, Boulton and Grytcko. What this thesis
proposes to do, and what characterises and differentiates this thesis from the work done so far, is to give a more complete analysis of the connection between Freud’s model of the tripartite psyche and the novel *Peter Pan* by taking into account several other important characters in order to demonstrate that it is not only the two characters mentioned above who are relevant to Freud’s concepts. To complete this study, the work of other academics will be included in the following analysis. Therefore, the characters this thesis will take into account will be: Peter and Hook for the Id; Mr and Mrs Darling, Nana, and the Night-lights for the Super-ego; Wendy, Michael, John, and the Lost Boys for the Ego.

**Peter Pan and Captain Hook as Id**

According to Freud’s *The Ego and the Id*, published in 1923, the Id could be defined as the most inner part of the humans’ psyche, a section of the self where pleasure, passion, and instinct reign uncontested (Freud 10). He continues his description by arguing that this part of our psyche is never set free, like “a man on a horse back, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse” (Freud 11): the passions are usually pushed back (repression), or disguised as something else (sublimation), or expressed through dreams. Within Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, the personifications of the Id are free to act without the external repression or the rules that govern the real world. In this section, Neverland and two characters of Barrie’s novel will be analysed as the personification of the Freudian Id.

According to Egan, Neverland is a metaphor for the unconscious, the place where passions can rule free, and where the primitive nature of children can find satisfaction and gratification (Egan 41). As soon as the Darlings’ children arrive on the island, “they all recognised it at once [...] not as something long dreamt of and
seen at last, but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home from the holidays” (Barrie 36). Neverland is thus perceived as an original state of being to which the children can return once more, a state of freedom, as free as their souls were before society started to impose its values and restrictions. It is also worth noting that, as Barrie wrote, “it is only the gay and innocent and heartless who can fly” (Barrie 144), and thus it is only they who can reach the island. This state of being is not always recognized as positive, since Barrie gives the reader a dual vision of it: yes, in Neverland the children can fly, they can meet the mermaids (Barrie 67) and befriend the Indians (Barrie 83), and Wendy can nurture the Lost Boys and her pet wolf as she desired (Barrie 27, 63), but it is also a place of terrors, murders, hangings, and dark shadows that crawl at night (Barrie 5). In addition, on the island it is not only children but also adults who can give space to their inner and deepest desires, as evident in the quotation “some unsteady fairies [that] had to climb over [Peter] on their way home from an orgy” (Barrie 59). Therefore, Neverland can be defined as the inner place in everyone’s mind, were the Id can rule free. In this place, both Peter and Captain James Hook are the characters who seek instant satisfaction for their desires, and therefore are reflections of the Id.

As pointed out by Gryctko in her “Romance in the Nursery” (2016), Hook belongs to the category of the Lost Man, a child who grew up but decided to differ from other adults: in fact, childish passions are still a predominant characteristic in him, and as much as Peter he searches for immediate gratification, as for example when he kills a pirate out of nowhere, just because he wants to (Barrie 45). Hook is an adult whose conscience is still asleep and is not formed as it should be, compared to the other adults present in the novel: in his psyche the super-ego was not able to lay a foundation, and therefore he did not grow up as he should, or as
society expected him to do. He is also a figure of temptation, since he offers the children the opportunity to grow up as adults but remain “delightfully lost” (Grycuko 147), implying that they do not have to give up their desires and pleasures if they do not want to. It is possible therefore to state that Hook is the dark side of Peter Pan, or as Peter could be if he ever decides to grow up – something that the reader knows well will never happen (Barrie 23, 140). The Captain is described as a romantic anti-hero by Barrie, with his long curly black hair, his intelligent and blue of the forget-me-not eyes with a hint of melancholy in them, his clothes sewed by the fashion of the court of Charles II, and with the behaviour of a gentleman (Barrie 44, 45); plus, he is described as “not wholly evil” (Barrie 107) since he loves flowers, good music, and is slightly sensitive (Barrie 107), all traits usually associated with females. Therefore he is depicted as feminine in some way, but also childish and, as a consequence, not fair nor honest since he would do anything to win Peter over, even use subterfuges, which is what he does in order to triumph over his enemies: first with the “rich damp cake” baked for the Lost Boys (Barrie 49), then when he scratches Peter with his hook twice (Barrie 77), and again with the ambush in which the Indians died (Barrie 98), and finally with the poison that he dropped in Peter’s cup (Barrie 107, 108). He wants to win and will do anything to achieve it. Wanting something at any cost indicates immaturity, which is a trait of the Id since it operates on the pleasure principle with no regard for anything else and is completely instinctual (Freud 10). Another sign of his immaturity is pointed out by his attempt to kill Smee – a pirate of Hook’s crew – because of his jealousy towards him (Barrie 115): the children seem to love Smee but they all despise Hook, and this arouses in him rage which brings him near to killing his most trusty bosun, but in the end he becomes aware that killing someone with a ‘good form’ – i.e. appropriate behaviour
would mean to show ‘bad form’ – i.e. to misbehave –, and therefore he backs down (Barrie 115). Despite the actions described above suggesting that Hook has a conscience, or that he is at least provided with a Super-ego, the same actions actually suggest that the Id is not only present but superior to any possible presence of the Ego or of the Super-ego: he is not moved by compassion nor regret, but his actions are always delineated by the unconscious part of him that wants him to be always right. Hence, since Hook follows his desires instead of acting with rationality, he can be said to have a personality dominated by the Id.

Peter is the incarnation of the primitive Id. As Freud remarks, children are born with the Id as their main feature, and only later do they develop the Ego and the Super-ego (Freud 17). When Peter meets Wendy for the first time, he narrates to her that he ran away from his parents at a very young age “because I heard father and mother […] talking about what I was to be when I became a man […] I don’t want ever to be a man […] I want always to be a little boy and to have fun” (Barrie 23). This means that he could have developed an Ego, but not a Super-ego since it can be formed only by staying within society. As Grytcko observes, Neverland offers Peter the opportunity to stay in a perpetual childhood and never grow older, and so the island gives him a chance to fulfil his desire to continue to play, but more important to not be restricted by the limitations and the impositions of an adult’s life (Grytcko 147). From the beginning Peter is described as a cocky and naughty boy (Barrie 6), rather arrogant when he struts around (Barrie 22), and also as a prankster when he tries to teach the children how to fly (Barrie 29) and a puppeteer when he wants the Darlings’ children to follow him to Neverland (Barrie 30). Like Hook, Peter is moved by the desire of having everyone and everything for himself, and that everyone should be around him to meet his demands. In fact Peter tends to be easily annoyed
when he is contradicted by anyone (Barrie 21, 36, 76, 81), and reacts angrily if proved wrong or when nobody listens to him, as happens when the Lost Boys and Wendy decide to go back to London (Barrie 93). Also, he does not show compassion or regret when killing someone, whether it be pirates or some of the Lost Boys “when they seem to be growing up, which is against the rules” (Barrie 42). As Boulton notes in her “Peter Pan and the Flight from Reality” (2006), Peter “takes a sadistic pleasure in ‘thinning out’ his band of lost boys” (Boulton 309). Nor is he concerned about the thought of death, thinking about it just as “an awfully big adventure” (Barrie 78); he actually thinks it is funny to see that someone is about to die, for example when Michael falls asleep and almost drowns, and the only reason he saves him is because “it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life” (Barrie 33). Peter shows reckless behaviour towards those who follow him as he cares only about his own needs, and at the same time he is so full of himself and of the adventures he could have that he quickly forgets about anything and anyone else: he is completely self-absorbed, and he fails to remember Wendy and her brothers shortly after he loses sight of them (Barrie 35). Peter’s behaviour can be viewed from the perspectives outlined in Coline Covington’s “The Origin of Morality” (2015), as she asserts that “the source of our morality can be found in the initial mirroring of the mother that is fundamental to the development and functioning of the observing ego in relation to the ego” (Covington 4). She then clarifies that it is the relationship between the mother, or caregiver, and the infant that helps the child to understand what is right and what is wrong, moreover it helps the newborn to adjust his/her needs and later to create empathy with other people (Barrie 8, 9). This subsequently creates the opportunity for the Super-ego to be assimilated into the child’s mind. However, since Peter flew away from his family when he was
not even a month old, he did not have the opportunity to bond with his mother nor his father, and thus he could not forgive empathy nor delimit his needs; this implies that, when he left, he was mostly under the control of the Id. Therefore he does not understand that, as leader of the Lost Boys, he should put aside his needs and take care of them, something that does not happen: an example of this is when he does not feed the children properly because he is not in the mood for doing so, denies the food to them, and he only allows to eat when they “were getting loose for [their] tree” (Barrie 63). That is, Peter gives the Lost Boys and Wendy permission to eat only when they are losing weight and are too small to fit into the hollow trees that will bring them under the house (Barrie 63).

Another interesting aspect of Peter’s denial of the adult world and anything related to it is the negation of sexuality. Freud stated that sexuality begins during infancy when the child attaches himself to the parent of the opposite gender, and that later this attachment results in the Oedipus complex, in which the son desires to eliminate the father and be the sexual partner of the mother (Barry 97). In Barrie’s *Peter Pan*, a suggestion of an Oedipus complex can be found in the antagonism between Peter and Hook: as Boulton suggests, “Peter’s act of cutting off Hook’s arm and throwing it to a passing crocodile can be understood as a desire to castrate Hook” (Boulton 311). At the beginning of the book, Peter is caught looking into the window of the Darlings’ nursery while listening to a story Wendy’s mother is narrating (Barrie 8); then he comes back for his shadow, and when he sees Wendy he wants her to follow him in order to make her his and the Lost Boys’ mother (Barrie 26, 27). Peter and Wendy also exchange kisses and thimbles (Barrie 22, 25), which could be a resemblance to a traditional marriage. As Egan points out in his “The Neverland of Id” (1982), as soon as Wendy sets foot on the island she takes the role as wife and
mother, while Peter plays both son and husband: “She calls him ‘Father’, and he responds by referring to her as his ‘old lady’” (Egan 45). Peter thinks of himself as both Wendy’s son and husband, roles that are threatened when Hook takes her away from him: even Hook wants the mother for himself, therefore the clash between Peter and Hook becomes a parallelism of Oedipus and his Father. When Peter defeats Hook he himself becomes the pirate, changing even his clothes to the ones Hook wore (Barrie 130, 131). However, even if Peter plays the role of the father, he actually rejects the same role. The realisation comes when he asks Wendy to confirm that the Lost Boys are not really his own descendants:

“Peter, what is it?”

“I was just thinking,” he said, a little scared. “It is only make-believe, isn’t it, that I am their father?”

“Oh yes,” Wendy said primly.

“You see,” he continued apologetically, “it would make me seem so old to be their real father.”

“But they are ours, Peter, yours and mine.”

“But not really, Wendy?” he asked anxiously.

“No, if you don’t wish it” she replied; and she distinctly heard his sigh of relief. (Barrie 87)

The thought of being a real father scares Peter so much because it would mean that he has actually grown up, something that he does not want. He refuses the impositions of society, which include the necessity to grow up and to procreate. Peter is surrounded by women that want to make him a man – Tinker Bell, Tiger Lily, and Wendy – but because of his lack of understanding towards the needs of the others he
is totally bewildered by the girls’ behaviour (Barrie 87). In the end, when he brings back the Darlings’ children and Wendy proposes that he stays at her house and grows old with her, he feels repugnance: “Keep back, lady, no one is going to catch me and make me a man” (Barrie 140). Even if Peter plays being Wendy’s husband and the Lost Boys’ father, in reality he rejects these roles. As long as it is ‘make-believe’ he wants to join and to be a part of it, but as soon as he is offered the chance to be an adult he withdraws. To be an adult male involves growing and taking responsibility, but he, on the contrary, wants to play and please himself for eternity, implying that he will always be a slave of the Id. Therefore, Peter detaches himself from the reality in which these femmes fatales want to bring him, and so he destroys any attempt of the heteronormative society to tie him down in the conventional circle of life.

**The Adults and the Super-ego**

Freud affirmed that, in one’s mind, the Super-ego is that which is most detached from the unconscious (Freud 12). This part of our psyche operates as an intermediary between the individual and the regulations which society imposes upon everyone. The super-ego works also as the voice of conscience and morality, and as a strict controller of the Id’s desires. The super-ego is formed by two parts, one conscious and the other unconscious; the conscious part is the one in which the person is aware that what he or she is doing is somehow wrong, and therefore the individual will feel shame, guilt and attempt to repress these feelings, or even disguise them (Crossley 2). The unconscious part of the Super-ego, however, works “below the level of our consciousness and beyond our conscious reach” (Crossley 2), suggesting that the person is not even aware that he or she is suppressing an unspeakable desire. In this
section, several aspects of Barrie’s novel will be analysed as the personification of the Freudian super-ego.

While Neverland is the metaphor for the unconscious, London represents the place where the super-ego expresses itself. London is the reality, it is a place where there is a strict law and no child has the slightest opportunity to become a Lost Boy nor a Lost Man. To stay in London means to live in the city of adults, of rules, of civilized society, and consequently of the super-ego. In this city, the adults follow a path which seems to resemble an assembly line: all children become adults, who then have a job – an ordinary office job –, a house, a spouse, and several children who then will become adults and so forth. It is a place in which children are not allowed to be children, and in which the emotions must be expressed calmly and with decorum. In this case, Mr and Mrs Darling are metaphors of the civilized society, the English society – or specifically, the society of London – of Barrie’s epoch which reflects itself in everything the Darlings do and are.

Mr Darling is an average office worker who wishes to be an important man, and to enter high society, but he is not able to do so through his work, since it is a mediocre occupation, nor through money – it is made clear by Barrie at the beginning of the novel that the Darlings are not rich. This becomes clear when Mr Darling is seen to be counting his money in order to understand if they can keep Wendy or not (Barrie 2). Therefore, he tries to break into high society through his wife’s connections and through showing his wife as a trophy. Mrs Darling, in fact, is depicted only through the roles of wife and mother but not described as a woman – she does not even own a name–, linking her to the picture of woman-object that was usual in the late Victorian Era. Equally, at one point in the novel Barrie addresses directly the reader and criticises Mrs Darling: “You see, the woman had no proper
spirit. I had meant to say extraordinary nice things about her, but I despise her, and not one of them will I say now” (Barrie 132), therefore criticising her as parent.

Mr and Mrs Darling live controlled lives, lives which must follow certain societal schemes: which means, in other words, that a man must find a job and support his family, while a woman must behave ladylike, find a well off husband, have a family and leave the children with a nanny while planning dinner parties and socialising. The Darlings’ children and the Lost Boys, in the end, follow this path too. As soon as they come back from Neverland, the Boys are sent to school, and “the power to fly gradually left them” (Barrie 141), and only Michael and Wendy are able to keep this ability for a little longer; but in the end, when they become adults, they all forget how to fly:

All the boys were grown up and done for by this time; so it is scarcely worth while saying anything more about them. You may see the twins and Nibs and Curly any day going to an office, each carrying a little bag and an umbrella. Michael is an engine-driver. Slightly married a lady of title, and so he became a lord. You see that judge in a wig coming out at the iron door? That used to be Tootles. The bearded man who doesn’t know any story to tell his children was once John. (Barrie142, 143)

For the Boys, to grow up means to kill the child that they once were: all the joy, and the adventures, and the excitement were eradicated in order to make room for more practical aspects until there was nothing left of their childhood freedom. They have become an inseparable and homogeneous part of the mass of Londoners, and they have forgotten who they once were. Only Wendy seems to be able to remember, keeping it secret in her heart as if it was dust in a box (Barrie 142). Therefore, it is
possible to state that Mr and Mrs Darling, as well as the other adults portrayed in the novel, represent society and its rules and restrictions, and therefore they symbolise the perfect outcome of the victory of Super-ego over the Id.

There are several other characters that, through the novel, act as the embodiment of the super-ego, including Nana and the Lights. These characters operate as an intermediary between the Darlings children’s childhood and adulthood, or even between the Id of their mind and their emerging super-ego. Among them, Mrs Darling is the one who mostly resembles the actions and the ways of the super-ego; Barrie observes, at the beginning of the novel, Mrs Darling’s tendency to “rummage in their [the children’s] mind and put things straight for next morning” (Barrie 4) as soon as they go to sleep. This image represents in a certain way the process that happens within the humans’ brain when the body is asleep: during this phase, the brain, among other functions, throws away some unnecessary memories, stores others, and supports learning and memory, helping also to regulate moods, so that “the naughtiness and evil passions with which you went to bed have been folded up small and placed at the bottom of your mind, and on the top, beautifully aired, are spread out your prettier thoughts, ready for you to put on” (Barrie 4). According to Egan, Mrs Darling, as the super-ego, represses and repacks the thoughts that have wandered free and those which have strangely found their way into their mind (Egan 42): in the passage mentioned above, Mrs Darling is helping to suppress and repress in the most inner part of the children’s mind all the “naughtiness and evil passions”, all the improper new thoughts which could bring chaos if set free. This repression and control of inappropriate thought and ideas helps to create the basis of social morality in children’s minds (Covington 6), and therefore helps the super-ego to become stronger. Consequently, Nana and the Night-lights act not only as an
extension of Mrs Darling, but also as a supplemental super-ego that watches over the children.

Nana is a Newfoundland dog with a strong maternal instinct, and is the children’s nanny – or nurse, as she is called in the novel; her role through the novel is the one of substitute mother, a role which actually all the nurses at that time performed. Nana is a figure of compassion and care, but is also severe when the children misbehave: while bringing the children to school, she is seen usually “walking sedately by their side when they were well behaved, and butting them back into line if they strayed” (Barrie 3). Like Mrs Darling, Nana acts as the symbolic representation of the super-ego as well, helping the children to be presentable and to behave correctly. Furthermore, she attacks Peter when he first appears in the children’s nursery, making him fly away but capturing his shadow (Barrie 9), an episode which symbolises how, even if they wanted to make him disappear forever from their lives, it is not possible to keep Peter – and therefore the Id – out of the children’s mind.

Finally, the third element, the night-lights, can also be viewed from this perspective: in order to reassure Michael, Mrs Darling tells her children that the night-lights are “the eyes a mother leaves behind her to guard her children” (Barrie 16); this alone makes the reader understand that the glowing lights are an expansion of the mother’s powers, that is of surveillance and of protection from any harm, or from the assault of the wild Id. It is only when Nana is chained up, and Mrs Darling is at the party, and the night lights go out that Peter is able to sneak himself into the children’s room.
Wendy, John, Michael, and the Lost Boys: Ego and Ego Ideal

According to Freud, the Ego is the part of the tripartite system that mediates the demands of the Id, the super-ego, and reality (Freud 10). The ego helps the individual to inhibit the passions of the Id, and at the same time tries to harmonise the pressures and requests of the Super-ego. The ego works on the reality principle, which means that it tries to satisfy the Id’s desire in a way that is socially acceptable (Freud 10). It helps to create a sense of social morality and at the same time develops the conscience in the individual. In this section, the children in Barrie’s novel will be presented as the personification of the Freudian ego.

At the beginning of the novel, Wendy, John, and Michael are represented as children in which the society is already laying the foundation for the super-ego to build conscience and morality; they are surrounded by agents of the super-ego agents – i.e. Mrs Darling and Nana – who guide them and tone down the excesses produced by the children’s wild spirits. In the scene before the flight to Neverland, they are described as ‘playing’ family – John as the Father and then himself, Michael as the Son, and Wendy as the Mother –, while their parents look at them with tenderness (Barrie 11). The interruption of this peaceful illusion of childhood happens twice: firstly, when Mr Darling orders Michael to “be a man” (Barrie 13), and secondly when he decides to chain Nana up in the yard (Barrie 15). Considering that she was their nanny ever since the children were babies, the banishment of Nana from the nursery marks the end of the children’s infancy and their entrance into adulthood. Therefore, when Peter shows up and offers them an escape, they do not think twice but accept immediately to leave for Neverland, signifying that they are not ready to become adults yet. As soon as they land on Neverland, the children are divided not by any external influence, but by something
within them. In the chapter “The home under the ground”, it is made clear how the boys go out and have adventures, while Wendy has to stay at home, cooking and mending their clothes (Barrie 63). This gender role division imitates the one present in the society of London and of the super-ego, as previously analysed: so, even if the children try to escape the roles which society forces upon them, they actually end up assuming these roles. Gryctko observes that “The women of Peter Pan [...] are ‘of the kind that lik[e] to grow up’ [...] while the boys would prefer to stay boys, and in the company of other boys, forever” (Grytcko 143). This, in fact, is what really happens, because, from this point on, Wendy and the Boys take two different directions.

John and Michael arrive on the island with the promise of adventures, of killing pirates and befriending Indians, and of course with the implicit assurance to never grow up and to enjoy an eternal childhood with everything they wanted. When they arrive on the island, they meet the Lost Boys, a group of male children who fell out of their prams when they were babies and whose parents did not claim (Barrie 25). They are sent to Neverland, and while there they follow Peter and pledge their allegiance to him until they are killed by pirates or by Peter himself when they seem to grow up (Barrie 42). They are so loyal to Peter that, when Tinker Bell cheats the Boys into killing Wendy, they do not question his desire but obey the fake order (Barrie 51). This blind obedience could make the reader assume that the boys long ago gave up any connection with the super-ego, and that they decided to follow blindly what the Id commands them. However, when they understand that Peter brought Wendy on the island to be their mother, they do not act as if they do not care but rather weep and become sad, as well as being scared of what Peter will do to them. Nevertheless, Tootles does not run away or deny that it was him who shot
Wendy but instead decides to face his destiny: “Tootles did not flinch. He bared his breast. ‘Strike, Peter,’ he said firmly, ‘strike true’” (Barrie 54). This evidences that, even if they follow the Id, the super-ego has some grip in their lives, and that they are not as totally deprived of it as Peter is. Another episode which confirms this theory is in the chapter “The Pirate Ship” (Barrie 113-119). After being captured, Hook offers to two of the boys the possibility of joining his ship, and therefore to become pirates; John and Michael are fascinated by this offer, but as soon as Hook tells them that they have to be traitors of the crown and to betray the King, they quickly withdraw. As long as the boys follow Peter and play at being pirates or redskins, that is as long as it is all ‘make-believe’, they want to join. However, when Hook proposes that they become real pirates, and so to become Lost Men, they are not ready for this, and this proves that their ego is actually strong enough to control the Id's desires, and that the super-ego has already started to modify the children’s behaviour. During the Victorian Period, boys had an education which shifted from a boyhood of freedom, games, rebellion, and experiences of various kind, to a sudden and drastic change in their lives: in fact, as soon as they finished school, they were expected to stop acting as a child and start to be serious and grow up properly, in order to be active members of society (Grytcko 144-145). The shift from boyhood to manhood is so radical that the boys become men “not through an evolution of character, but through the end of one character and the assumption of another” (Grytcko 145). The boy has to ‘die’ in order to become a man, and that is what John, Michael, and the Lost boys want to avoid by entering Neverland, so as to never let the inner child die. However, in the end they decide to follow Wendy back to London and to grow up, meaning that they “move from id expression to ego achievement” (Bettelheim 76). Wendy in fact acts as the voice of reason, which helps the children to avoid being totally absorbed by
Peter’s Id and therefore to not lose themselves in this Pleasure Island. The ego knows that full immersion in the Id is just an illusion, and that the children must come back in order not just to grow up physically, but to continue to develop themselves and their character.

Contrary to what the boys have experienced, Wendy follows a different path. While John and Michael are attracted by the promise of great adventures, Wendy is drawn on the island to Peter by the promise of taking care of him and the Lost Boys (Barrie 27); to see and meet mermaids and fairies is just a bonus for her, a kind of minor experience. As soon as she lands on the island, the boys ask her to be their mother, and even if she admits that she has no real experience she gladly accepts this position (Barrie 59). Therefore, while the boys are out hunting or defeating pirates and Indians, Wendy stays at home, sometimes for so long that “there were whole weeks when […] she was never above ground” (Barrie 63). She cooks for the boys, she darts and sews their clothes, and she takes care of them as a real mother would do. The reader may think that this could be seen as ironic, since Wendy flies away from London in order to avoid growing up and having responsibility but she actually ends up doing what she tried to avoid. However, it is important to note that everything she does is ‘make-believe’, in other words she imagines and pretends to fulfil the mother-role which the boys asked her: as long as she has to pretend, and is protected by the Neverland’s game dimension, she is more than happy to play the mother in that particular case. She is still not ready to become a real mother. Another peculiarity of Wendy is her memory: while John and Michael forget about their parents as soon as they land on the island, and moreover Michael “believe[s] that she was really his mother” (Barrie 63-64), Wendy is the one character who strives to not forget them nor forget her real house; she interrogates the boys almost daily about
their parents, asking them to write down what they remember about their life before Neverland – questions as “What was the colour of Mother’s eyes? Which was taller, Father or Mother? Was Mother blonde or brunette?” (Barrie 64) and so on. Furthermore, she narrates the story of her parents, and how Wendy and her brothers arrived there, in order to not make her brothers forget that the house under the ground is not their real house.

Wendy is a figure in betwixt, torn between being just a child and acting as the adult she was prepared to become. During the Victorian Era, and specifically in the upper middle classes, there was a huge gender disparity in the education of children. In fact, girls had a different education from boys: while the latter suffered a sudden change from boyhood to manhood, the former did not undergo this kind of experience. The girls did not attend school nor have a proper education, and usually they were tutored at home under the supervision of governesses who prepared them to be the perfect mothers and housekeepers (Grytcko 144). Furthermore, it was common that girls in their early teens were considered already suitable for marriage, and therefore they “did not have the luxury of the playful childhoods” embraced by their male peers (Grytcko 144). Thanks to this cultural background, it is possible to understand why the character of Wendy is peculiar, and why she is able to decline the persuasion of the Id-Peter; she acts as the real incarnation of the Ego, which is able to control both the burst of passions of the Id and at the same time the pressures that come from the Super-ego.

**Conclusion**

The analysis presented above shows how it is not only Peter but several other characters present in the novel who can be examined through the Freudian concept of
the tripartite psyche. Before analysing the novel and the articles, it was interesting to notice how some characters could be interpreted in a different way; as an example, one could consider that Hook could be placed under the Super-ego section because he is an adult, or likewise that Wendy, being the more mature among the children, could be located in the same section.

Hook and Peter are both the outcome of an uncontrolled Id which resulted in them being unable to become part of the conventional society, and are therefore to be considered not just lost but also to live meaningless lives. As Kenneth notes, “Peter Pan was a very sad young man. His life was filled with contradictions, conflicts, and confusion […] For all his gaiety, he was a deeply troubled boy living in an even more troubling time. He was caught in the abyss between the man he didn’t want to become and the boy he could no longer be” (Kidd 87). On the contrary, the characters of Mr and Mrs Darling are the result of an overly influential Super-ego, which drains their life-blood and transforms them into a kind of android; even if they are part of society and are seen as a perfect example of societal restraint, they lose their inner essence, their spirit, and become just empty shells. Lastly, Wendy and the Lost Boys, including her brothers, seems to be the perfect balance between the Id and the Super-ego, and therefore they are the embodiment of the Ego which seeks to adjust itself to both the desires of the Id and the demands of the Super-ego.
Works Cited


