



*“I like her best”: Motherhood and
Revision in J. M. Barrie’s
Pan Narratives*

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Figure 1: Mary Darling,
https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Mary_Darling?file=Mary_Peter_Pan.jpg.



Adaptation as Revision

Weiland Schwanebeck: revisions as adaptations that go “against the grain” of the original text, usually highlighting an underdeveloped character or a problematic subtext (2)

Figure 2: P. J. Hogan’s *Peter Pan*,
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1128577-peter_pan.



Barrie and Motherhood

R. D. S. Jack (1990): mother as “both the prime creator . . . and the superior writer” (“The Manuscript” 103)

Joy Morse: Mrs. Darling’s “unconscious conflict with Victorian social expectations gives rise to her role as the creator of Neverland and Peter Pan, products of her own fantasy world” (282)

Research Question

“[A]nd thus it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless” (*Peter and Wendy* 226).

“Look at her in her chair, where she has fallen asleep . . . Some like Peter best and some like Wendy best, but **I like her best**” (*Peter and Wendy* 210).

- Is the role of motherhood both static and positive throughout Barrie’s work?
- Does *Peter and Wendy* suggest something bleak and sympathetic about mothers that *Peter Pan* does not?

Motherhood in Neverland

Peter Pan

WENDY: Now I want you to consider the feelings of the unhappy parents with all their children flown away. Think, oh think, of the empty beds!

(The heartless ones think of them with glee) (64).

Peter and Wendy

“Everything just as it should be, you see. Off we skip like the most heartless things in the world, but so attractive; and we have an entirely selfish time; and then when we have need of special attention we nobly return for it, confident that we shall be embraced instead of smacked. So great indeed was their faith in a mother’s love that they felt they could afford to be callous for a bit longer” (166).



Figure 4: The Lost Boys Hideout,
<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/fd/aa/49/fdaa49f0a5267e0b51b4e99146811c62.jpg>



Figure 5: Illustration by Kathleen Atkins,
<https://jmbarrie.co.uk/photos/peter-pan-and-wendy-ill-by-kathleen-atkins-1930>.



The Return Home

Peter Pan

(MRS. DARLING is asleep on a chair near the window, her eyes tired with searching the heavens . . . [she starts] up as if we had whispered to her that her brats are coming back) (86).

Peter and Wendy

“The corner of her mouth, where one looks first, is almost withered up. Her head moves restlessly on her breast as if she had a pain there. Some like Peter best and some like Wendy best, but I like her best” (210).

Figure 6: Illustration by Alice B Woodward from "The Peter Pan Picture Book," <https://jmbarrie.co.uk/photos/illustration-by-alice-b-woodward-from-the-peter-pan-pi>.

The Final Scene

(No one is as gay as [PETER]. With rapturous face he produces his pipes, and the Never BIRDS and the FAIRIES gather closer till the roof of the little house is so thick with his admirers that some of the fall down the chimney. He plays on and on til we wake up) (95).

James Kincaid: “The mother I construct from the play is both oafish and deadly, a cross between Edith Bunker and Medusa. Wendy comes into the play as an intruder, a disturber of the peace and play, sets up a school, and is last seen on a broomstick, where she should have been all along” (285).

Figure 7: Maude Adams as Peter Pan in the first US production of Peter Pan, <https://jimbarrie.co.uk/photos/maude-adams-as-peter-and-the-lost-boys-in-the-first-us>.



Another Final Scene

Peter Pan

WENDY: This is how I planned it if he ever came back . . . and when Jane grows up I will hope *she* will have a little daughter, who will fly away with him in turn—and in this way may I go on for ever and ever, dear Nana, so long as children are young and innocent (qtd. in Birkin 164).



Figure 8: Dorothea Baird as Mrs Darling and Arthur Lupino as Nana, <https://jmbarrie.co.uk/photos/dorothea-baird-as-mrs-darling-and-arthur-lupino-as-nana>.



Of course
in the end
Wendy let
them fly
away. x
x

The Novel's Final Scene

Peter and Wendy

“And thus it will go on, so long as children are gay
and innocent and heartless” (226).

Figure 9: Illustration by Gwynedd May Hudson from “Peter
and Wendy,” <https://jmbarrie.co.uk/photos/peter-pan-wendy-1931-ill-gwynedd-m-hudson>.

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