TEA PARTIES, FAIRY DUST, AND CULTURAL MEMORY: THE MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND AND PETER PAN OVER TIME

Jeena Kim

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Committee:

Jeremy Wallach, Advisor
Esther Clinton
Marilyn Motz
This thesis considers how and why recognizable elements of *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* are widely disseminated throughout present-day popular culture despite the age and relative obscurity of the literary stories on which they are based. I examine three different approaches to Alice and Peter in our contemporary moment: material culture, adaptation, and fictionalized origin stories. Using such theorists as Roland Barthes, Judith Butler, Mikhail Bakhtin, Victor Turner, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault, I argue that articulations of *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* persist as access points to feelings of childhood enchantment, inspiration, and innocence, rather than just as specific texts, images, or characters that must be faithfully recreated. This phenomenon provides insight into how older frames of reference are continuously and smoothly adapted to reflect contemporary ideologies and values with minimal cognitive dissonance in our shared cultural memory despite wide divergences from earlier sources.
To Steven, with all my love.
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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I examine the persistence and evolution of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan as cultural indices from their origins to the present day. The use of the term “cultural index” in this case is deliberate, as are the unitalicized titles of the texts in question. Unlike traditional collections of information such as lists or print encyclopedias, which have content locked in perpetual material stasis, an “index” evokes an ever-evolving system that maintains certain entries and updates others by discarding the dated and incorporating the new. Over the years, these two sets of stories have amassed a wide assortment of continually evolving associations that include both tangible and intangible things (such as particular sounds, clothing, props, settings, styles, quotes, references, feelings, etc.) in all manner of media. This investigation is therefore not strictly limited to the original Barrie and Carroll’s titles. Thus, I use the term “cultural index” to reflect the multitudinous, strange, and mutable manifestations of Alice’s and Peter’s unlikely and yet continued presence in contemporary society. Ultimately, this thesis is an examination of how and why certain significant visual, thematic, and narrative elements from Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan become cemented into our collective cultural memory while others fade over time.

Pairing Peter and Alice for this study seemed natural. Both stories are considered children’s classics and feature a child protagonist in a fantastical space that does not conform to the rules of ordinary society. Although these narratives are considered by many to be fairytales, and have even been included in some fairytale anthologies in abridged form, the first published stories are authored, longer, and more narratively complex. Both tales are British and despite the fifty-year gap between their initial publication dates, heavily influenced by Victorian ideologies. Yet although both stories are dated and reflect similarly dated ideologies, contemporary
American audiences remember and recognize several distinct elements of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland due to Alice and Peter’s ongoing adaptation and reincorporation into popular culture as well as their status as cultural touchstones.

Even in the realms of film and TV, Peter and Alice continue to be significant and popular into the present day. In this year alone, in 2014, there are two major Peter Pan-related Hollywood films in development: Pan (2015) and Peter and the Starcatchers (pending). Last year, both Alice and Peter played lead roles in ABC’s Once Upon a Time series (with Peter playing the main villain in season two, and Alice featured in her own spin-off Once Upon a Time in Wonderland). Also, March of 2013 saw the debut of John Logan’s play, Peter and Alice. In 2011, SyFy aired Neverland, a prequel mini-series, after their 2009 success with Alice, a miniseries that reimagined Wonderland through a sci-fi lens. In 2010, Tim Burton attempted his own take on a sequel to the Alice in Wonderland story, featuring an older Alice’s return to Wonderland. A sequel for the Burton film is also currently in development. Even in the direct-to-DVD market, a Disney spin-off series featuring Tinkerbell and her fairy friends has released one film per year since 2008 (with the exception of 2013). It is worth noting that this rather extensive list covers only some of the more popular works from the last five years and does not account for the innumerable independent productions, works in other mediums, merchandise, or other stories inspired by these classic tales.

Peter and Alice are both seamlessly and recognizably integrated into the cultural fabric of our present moment. When Morpheus asks Neo if he wants to see “how far down the rabbit hole goes” in the first Matrix film, both the literary connection and meaning are clear. When someone is accused of suffering from “Peter Pan syndrome,” the charge does not get confused for boyish enthusiasm or pig-headed bravado, but rather an immature, child-like man who lacks a sense of
responsibility. Whether it is the white rabbit or the ticking crocodile, painting the roses, or 
learning to fly, the widespread dissemination of these visual, literary, and filmic references is 
commonplace enough to be unremarkable. Yet what is astonishing is how much is left on the 
cutting room floor of our shared cultural memory. In fact, this thesis project began with the 
realization that despite Alice and Peter’s widespread persistence in our contemporary moment, 
much of the initial stories by Barrie and Carroll remain obscure and unrecognizable. Setting 
aside the minutiae of the memorable (which is in constant flux from moment to moment), what 
remains of these narratives is foggy at best.

Crucial to the initial investigation of this phenomenon is Roland Barthes’s differentiation 
between a work and a Text in his essay, “From Work to Text.” As Barthes explains, “the work is 
a fragment of substance, it occupies a portion of the spaces of books (for example, in a library). 
The Text is a methodological field. […] The work is held in the hand, the text is held in 
language” (83). The Text extends from the work, but the work itself is static. The work contains 
the words, but the Text includes everything that comes out of a work. To understand this 
distinction is to see how a single narrative can be much more than the sum of its parts.

Since their creation, both Peter and Alice have become monumental palimpsests. Each 
influential variation introduced changes that became staples in our cultural imagination, these 
changes would then inevitably write over some of the more obscure, esoteric details from earlier 
versions up to and including the first publications. Over time, the Texts of both narratives have 
continuously refined our popular understanding of Alice’s and Peter’s vocabulary so that it 
includes items as disparate as the sound of animated Tinkerbell flying, the Lost Boy Rufio from 
the movie Hook, Alice in Wonderland wedding Pinterest pages, and tattoos of inaccurate-yet-
beautiful quotes wrongfully attributed to Carroll and Barrie. ² However, given that this collection
of associations is constantly updating and expanding, the relevant and remembered elements of Peter and Alice are part of an ever-current index of remnants that are linked by association to an evocative source, rather than the narrative logic of any specific work.

Although this is indeed a result of Textual expansion, I use the term “cultural index” to describe this particular Alice and Peter phenomenon in order to denote a more narrow use of Barthes’s idea. Barthes’s Text is an all-encompassing network while the work is limited to a strictly literal definition of a single material iteration of a cultural form. The cultural indices of Peter and Alice are a categorization within the Text of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan that accounts for a contemporary understanding of these narratives and their associations, as well as the cultural amnesia that naturalizes contemporary adaptations’ omission of once-relevant items such as certain characters, plot points, narrative developments, etc. That which is omitted in the adaptation process exists within the Text, but may not be in the index (and possibly, but not necessarily in the work).³

The cultural index therefore compels us to consider both memory and forgetfulness to contextualize our present moment. By using the idea of the cultural index, we can consider how different aspects of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland can be part of a larger Text while also being separate, distinct, and time-locked entities, as the story is understood in a particular moment in history. In an attempt to better understand this process of forgetting, remembering, and adapting, this thesis will examine three particular paths of development within the cultural indices of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland: material culture, adaptations, and fictional origin stories.

Chapter One argues that the material culture associated with Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland aligns with gendered expectations of play. I argue that the development of Alice and
Peter’s material culture over the years, despite the differences in time period or medium (play, TV show, film, etc.), aligns with the gender ideologies contemporary to each particular iteration’s production point in history. To articulate this point, I analyze how the outfits (and ultimately the costumes) for Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan change over time. My project for the chapter is therefore an examination of how our preconceived notions regarding these characters’ appearances are based on countless alterations and developments of what are otherwise strict guidelines for their customary dress, so that individual iterations of Alice and Peter are dressed in a manner that aligns with the gender ideologies of their time.

Chapter Two considers how the narratives of Peter Pan and Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland have adapted to retain mass appeal. My sites of analysis are eight adaptations divided into groups of four—the original publications (in the case of Peter Pan, I focus on the novel as well as the play), the Disney animated films, the Hollywood adaptations (Burton 2010 and Hogan 2003) and finally, the SyFy genre-bending miniseries Alice and Neverland. I argue that the first publications of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan, removed from their historical context, could not maintain the same sort of appeal that they inspired in their contemporary audiences. Through my analysis of various iterations of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, I argue that although later adaptations find ways to engage newer audiences, their appeal is inextricable from their identities as specifically Victorian Texts. Part of this appeal is due to their context; given that they were written in times of British imperial expansion, the initial narratives written by Carroll and Barrie are saturated with a hegemonic assumption of Western imperialist superiority that is articulated within the seemingly innocent genre of children’s literature. Although these adaptations may not all be explicitly imperialistic in nature, they must still contend with the imperialistic worldviews embedded into Barrie’s and Carroll’s stories.
Chapter Three engages with the question of how Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and J. M. Barrie are remembered in the fictional origin stories of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan. This chapter considers the two most recent fictional origin stories to argue that contemporary fictional representations of actual relationships that these authors had with the children who inspired their stories express deep-seated fears about these relationships’ potential for sexual abuse of children. When analyzing those portrayals, however, I find that the explicit denial of abuse actually suggests that abuse. I then argue that this simultaneous acceptance and denial of the potential threat of child abuse has a paradoxical effect insofar as the desired result of these origin stories is to create a pleasant image of these authors and their inspirations; however, the affections involved in the seemingly threatening, strange relationships between Dodgson and the Liddells or Barrie and the Llewelyn Davies can only be diverted onto socially normative love objects, rather than dispelled completely.

At its heart, this thesis grapples with questions of transience and cultural persistence in Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland as it pertains to American cultural development and interest. It finds that Peter and Alice remain relevant in our contemporary moment by selectively incorporating elements of memorable adaptations and discarding others. Our understanding of these texts is therefore akin to a continuously evolving, adapting, and self-renewing index of signifiers that says more about shifting ideologies regarding gender, childhood, imperialist nostalgia, and the imagination from a particular time period than it does about the stories that house those ideologies.

In a sense, this thesis traces the various evolutions of two Texts that seem to express certain ideologies pertinent to our contemporary moment. Although it may seem like an odd metaphor, this project is not unlike a study about the life cycle of a particular snake. Just as a
single egg can be identified as the first point in a snake’s autonomous existence after its emergence, the various articulations of Alice and Peter can be traced back to the two original Alice novels, and Peter Pan. Once hatched, the snake grows and takes on particular characteristics, which mirrors how Peter and Alice articulations early in the history of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland’s Textual development are sure to include certain key features such as scenes, characters, settings, or iconography. However, as snakes grow, they shed their skin to accommodate further growth while facilitating changes in their coloring. Similarly, Peter and Alice’s cultural indices discard certain features as they become outdated or obscure. And just as a snake’s life experience can introduce unanticipated physiological irregularities through circumstance such as illness and scarring that carry through multiple cycles of moulting, certain expressions of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan can introduce revisions and changes that are maintained beyond their first iteration. In a sense, this thesis is an exercise in understanding the present snake by examining its body, in addition to several of its discarded skins, to better understand where it came from, and why and how it appears as it does now.

Although I have chosen to focus my thesis on the cultural indices of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland due to the unique way in which they evoke feelings of childhood innocence and joy specific to their respective historical contexts, my larger project provides a method for considering the dissemination, maintenance, evolution, and elision of Textual articulations and expressions over lengths of time. Currently, there is already an infrastructure enabling access to enormous systems and networks of information sharing capable of moving massive amounts of data long distances in seconds. Considering the relative wealth of information access in this country, as well as the ubiquity of smart phones and various platforms through which information and cultural productions can be created, shared, and disseminated, our contemporary
moment seems remarkably well-suited for a project concerned with how the development of cultural productions over time influence shared cultural memory. This thesis highlights the importance of contextualizing the cultural products of a particular point in history not just in terms of their source material, but also in their various points of development across several mediums and adaptations.
CHAPTER I:
DRAWING FROM MATERIALITY: PLAY, DRESS, AND GENDER ROLES IN PETER AND ALICE’S SHIFTING IMAGE

As previously argued, Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland are two separate and similar cultural indices that are no longer limited to their original narrative texts. This chapter will explore how Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland have contributed to an American cultural understanding of childhood play since the time of their initial publications, which explains not only their continued popularity and widespread dissemination, but also their significance as cultural barometers monitoring the changing expectations of childhood over time. Notably, while these indices often emphasize what were only minor points within the narratives themselves, they also express significant material differences between Alice and Peter.

While neither of the plots is particularly memorable or remembered, certain specific scenes, characters, and settings from the two stories take up quite a bit of real estate in American popular consciousness. For example, the idea of Alice in Wonderland is often accompanied by images of tea sets, cakes that say “Eat Me,” bottles labeled “Drink Me,” clocks, playing cards, white rabbits, lace, ribbons, Victorian clothing, the color blue, checkered or striped cloth in combinations of black/red, black/white, black/blue, and blue/white, as well as specific styles and themes that call to mind certain characters (such as top hats or crowns). Similarly, a Peter Pan theme conjures up visions of jungles, pirate ships, cutlasses, boys in animal clothing, children flying in their nightclothes, a ticking crocodile, the color green, and again, specific themes and styles, and visual character notes (such as a glowing yellow light or a curled and powdered wig).

Although individual experience will color how significant or evocative a themed item might be, on a larger scale these items make up a general list of what is remembered. However, those aforementioned memorable articulations of each story fall under a gendered divide, with
the material culture of Alice and Peter aligning with respectively gendered articulations of childhood play.

*Gendered Props as Material Play*

Unsurprisingly, given the genders of each Text’s eponymous hero, the material culture for Alice aligns with femininity while Peter’s things fall in line with notions of masculinity. These alignments are informed by social expectations of gender. As Judith Butler’s concept of performativity outlines, “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (519). Although Butler’s argument deals specifically with bodies and performance, materials, as accessories to performance, play an important part in not only conveying gender, but also enacting it. With play making up an integral part of childhood behavior, and therefore gendered behavior, it is therefore no surprise that gender performativity influences our reception of Peter and Alice.

In Alice’s case, the memorable material and visual facets of Alice in Wonderland align with societal expectations for a feminine relationship with objects. On a strictly material level, Alice-ness lends itself to a far more extensive list of items. This Wonderland list is also associated with intangibles that affect material culture such as a particular aesthetic, which explains my inclusion of specific color-combinations and variations of fabrics within Alice’s cultural index. Tea and desserts (tarts and small cakes) and the various *accoutrements* associated with their dispensation and consumption are also intimately linked with the idea of Alice in Wonderland, so much so that the Disneyland theme park features a tea cup ride for Disney’s animated *Alice in Wonderland* movie, despite the fact that tea is featured in only one scene in both the Disney animated film and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. The remainder of the
Alice-themed items (clocks, playing cards, clothing) refers either to setting or to specific characters. The costumes, set designs, and accessories serve to evoke an Alice-setting that one can then explore through play. In other words, in order to engage with Alice, one must evoke the world of Wonderland through Alice-themed goods. Rather than directly imagining becoming Alice, the idea is that Alice-inspired environments create a sense of Alice within the player, as opposed to having the player act as a character through actions alone.

To return to Butler’s earlier point on the performance of gender, gender performativity is manifest in Alice’s material culture insofar as there is a certain extent to which young girls are expected to engage in sedentary play with objects that signify a particular setting. Playing house, hosting a tea party, or playing with dolls (traditionally coded as gender-normative for girls) all require material objects that are generally restricted to a single, small play area. This gendered arrangement meets with the social expectation that feminine behavior is associated with languid, graceful movements (which require measured, reserved behavior with attention to minute details).

The manipulation of small delicate objects is therefore at the heart of this style of domestic, social play. In order to host a tea party, one must first have a tea set. While not all children have equal access to expensive toys, the setting must be evoked a certain materiality. Although the tea table may only be a tree stump and the tea set a collection of appropriately shaped rocks or leaves, this style of play requires grounding in material reality. Admittedly there is room in this style of play for miming and liberal use of the imagination, but in the case of gender-normative play for girls, even if there are no material objects to interact with, there is usually some spatial organization of the play area to evoke an imagined setting (boxes and books become tables and chairs, paper leaves become a forest, etc.). This material preparation and
organization of suggestive play space, in turn, necessitates an emotional, evocative style of play that encourages dialogue, social interaction, and the manipulation of props to participate in a particular setting rather than emphasizing physical exertion, which falls in line with gender performativity and reinforces social codes for feminine behavior.

However, the need for material objects should not obfuscate their conceptual significance. Although the objects are tangible, they serve as access points to an imagined setting. There is no quantifiable score or objective beyond imaginative immersion in play. This feminine relationship with evocative material culture is explored further in Steven Gelber’s work on the gendered collection habits of hobbyists. Specifically, he cites an early twentieth-century study done by Caroline Burk that found that girls were likelier to collect items such as dolls, flowers, valentines, and books for their sentimental value (101-102). Gelber then notes, “[w]hat Burk found […] has been confirmed by modern studies that show […] women are attracted to aesthetic and emotionally meaningful things” (102). In other words, there is an assumed thoughtfulness in the female-coded relationship to material objects.

Alternatively, gender-normative play for boys engages with fewer material goods and for a different purpose. Gender performativity as Butler conceived of it works a bit better in Peter’s context insofar as much of Peter’s play is involved with movement, action, and performance. Boys are encouraged to be boisterous, active, with expansive, wide movements, taking up space and adventuring. There is also more of an emphasis on physically strenuous play in traditionally masculine-coded activities such as competitive sports or imaginary fight-scenarios (imagined play-acting that involves two or more contentious factions such as “Ninja Turtles,” “Pokémon,” or “Cops and Robbers”). It is therefore unsurprising that the male-coded Peter accessories (pirate gear, Lost Boys-wear) serve to facilitate movement and action, rather than conjure an
atmosphere. They are imminently portable and utilitarian. Insofar as costumes or accessories are used, they function to embody a character that interacts with the world at large. There is no need for set pieces here.

This distinction between evocative setting and active re-enactment is as gendered as Peter and Alice themselves. For instance, the elements of Peter Pan that persist in the general knowledge of the American cultural landscape include individual characters and their costumes (Hook, Tinker Bell, Peter, Wendy, Smee—hook, wings, green, blue, bandanna), memorable environments to explore (the jungle, the flying ship), and actions associated with characters (ticking crocodile, flying children in nightclothes). The material reality of this imaginative theme is far more flexible and less specific. This style of play needs only the suggestion of wilderness for Neverland and an approximation of sailing. Additionally, there is no setting that requires the material specificity of the Alice tea party. The joy of exploring Neverland comes from the embodied, imaginative play of intrepid explorers on the move, killing pirates, finding treasure, and hunting animals. This sparse material development of Peter-as-theme is unsurprising, given that Barrie’s original play originated from actual games of make-believe played by the Llewelyn Davies boys.

The use of materiality within this arena in setting and props is specific to male-coded styles of play. Gelber’s discussion of Burk’s findings is again useful here. Burk claims that male hobbyists not only collect aggressively, but also collect material items that are either powerful, economically valuable, or of “the male world” such as arrowheads or cigar bands (101-102). That is to say, the collectable goods items commonly associated with masculine strength, power, violence, or activity. They didn’t evoke a setting, but rather, they were items of power. The collectables also initiated or reflected strictly male activities (such as “scientific” archaeological
digs in backyards or the taboo adult male behavior of smoking). These items had immediate “practical” use values as trophies, items for barter, or props.

The intersection of accessorized, evocative setting and active, utilitarian objects can be found in the clothing and accessories worn by Alice and Peter. As previously mentioned, the material culture of both Alice and Peter, as fictionalized realizations of gendered childhood, conforms to ideas of gender-normative imaginative play and the performance of gender. The feminine relationship of Alice-play involves detailed interaction with evocative material goods arranged in a particular setting whereas masculine-coded Peter-play involves action through props regardless of the physical play space or the lack of certain locational signifiers. However, as a point of comparison, the shared space of memorable costumes and accessories enables an interesting opportunity. Alice and Peter costumes, as overlapping arenas, are particularly useful objects of analysis when considering how their images, as joint representations of children and separate representations of gender, have changed or persisted over the years. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the ways in which the appearance of both characters have changed concurrent with ideological shifts in their individual development as fictive representations of gender.

*The Girl in the Looking Glass*

As a character that comes to life for the first time on the written page, the original Alice (as first imagined by British author Lewis Carroll and then drawn by John Tenniel) wears clothing remarkably similar to later incarnations. In fact, John Tenniel’s illustration of *Wonderland* Alice is one of two key Alice templates (the other is Disney’s Alice). This reliable visual transmission over a century is what makes Alice’s evolving image a provocative and
significant representation of girlhood. Given Alice’s stable image, the development of each successive Alice figure acts as a commentary on the time period in which it was produced.

To start our discussion of Alice’s clothing and how it has developed over time, we begin with Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, the first mass-produced Alice novel, which was published in England in 1865, in the middle of the Victorian era. In order to contextualize this novel, it is important to recall that one of the key themes of the Victorian era relevant to this project is the predominance of the innocent child-figure. As such, Alice as a character is an interesting case study of embodied, often contradictory Victorian ideology.

In her book about Victorian girlhood entitled Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman, Catherine Robson traces the development of Victorian ideologies with regard to childhood as a particularly personal, feminine era that is marked by its association with a mythical, idyllic, preindustrial England as well as domestic ideology. She argues that these ideologies “strove to construct absolute and immutable places of safety, respectively the perfect childhood, the rural past, and the protected and stable home. All three havens, furthermore, found their ideal embodiment in the figure of the girl” (49). Robson situates the happy, genteel Victorian girl as the locus of both childhood and nationalist (British) nostalgia.

It is significant then, that Alice’s tale opens with a girl happily ignoring both her sister and her lessons while lounging outside. Right from the beginning, Alice keys into the figure of the ideal Victorian girl child. This girl, in addition to her status as a symbol of British purity, also signified the pastoral pleasures of nature and a well-kept upper-class home, both of which would keep this idealized figure safe from harm, and away from the actual and spiritual pollution of the cities.
Despite the artificial timelessness superimposed over this romanticized pastoral history, the debilitating influence of industrial progress endangered the ideological schemas of these romanticized girlhood havens through the real figure of the impoverished coal mining girl child smeared in grime. Robson lists several commissioners’ accounts of these working girls and is careful to note that the moral outrage implicit in these descriptions was focused less on the squalid conditions of the mines and more on specifically the female child laborers and the potential for the sexual exposure of these poverty-stricken girls dressed in rags. One particular commissioner reports, “some of [the workers] were of the age of puberty, the girls as well as the boys stark naked to the waist, their hair bound up with a tight cap, and trousers supported by their hips. Their sex was recognizable only by their breasts” (Robson 70). Other reports comment on the lack of stockings and shoes on the girls, as well as their exposed “black and filthy” thighs and legs (71). As Robson duly notes, this emphasis on nudity is not so much a commentary on poverty as it is on lasciviousness.

The examiners’ reported discomfort underscores the ideological prominence of innocent Victorian girlhood that demanded strict segregation of the sexes and the mandated innocence of girlhood. Robson argues,

[T]he comparative urge seems to be underwritten by a belief […] that all little girls should be sharing certain very specific kinds of life-experiences: whether they be rich or poor, girls should be enjoying their natural birthright of joyful “carelessness,” familiarity with green fields and primroses and a knowledge of the steps of old country dances (65).

This ideal figure of “proper” Victorian girlhood undoubtedly is the mold from whence Alice springs. This notion of the naturally cultivated Victorian girlhood explains why Alice’s
Wonderland perfectly simulates both nature and civilization through manicured rosebushes and paved forest roads. It is understandable too, that the events of the day are upper-class leisure activities: reciting poems, playing croquet, enjoying an elaborate tea with an overabundance of tea sets, and paying court to the Queen of Hearts. Curious, carefree, playful Alice is set loose upon Wonderland, and through her identity as the ideal girl-child she can access and enjoy the fruits of both Wonderland’s forests and its unsullied courtly halls.

Beyond the setting of Wonderland, Alice is dressed in the trappings of ideal Victorian girlhood. And in fact, Robson’s argument for idealized Victorian girlhood is also helpful in our interpretation of Alice as a girl-child of means. Although fictional Alice is an imagined character, the sexualization implicitly inscribed upon the coal miner’s body has its influence on her as well. This influence becomes apparent with the explicit preservation of Alice’s dignity in that the figure of Carroll’s Alice utterly lacks textual description. Unlike the anonymous miner with exposed legs and thighs, the only physical descriptor for Alice is that her hair “doesn’t go in ringlets at all” (Carroll 23). Alice is saved the indignity of verbal prodding and is only visually depicted through John Tenniel’s illustrations, which provide the first costume template for Alice in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* in 1865 (Cohen 129).

In this first set of images Alice is dressed as a contemporary child of the Victorian era in a knee-length dress with a wide, full skirt and short puffed sleeves, with a pinafore pinned to its front (Carroll 64-65). While Tenniel Alice’s clothing is a common enough style of dress for her time, Alice’s position as a fictional and idealized Victorian girl informs our understanding of her clothing. With the dinginess of Robson’s girl miner in mind, the inclusion of Alice’s pinafore, her pinned apron, seems almost excessively clean.
More so than any other article of Alice’s clothing, the pinafore conveys Alice’s identity as a child of the leisure class. Alice’s pinafore reflects the dual expectation that play, not work, would dirty her clothes, but that even under those circumstances, her dress should be unspotted. The expectation of slight dirt is what identifies Alice as specifically a wealthy child. Unlike a woman of the same social class, who is expected to be immaculate, a girl-child is allowed a certain degree of untidiness as she frolics in the countryside. However, unlike the pore-deep grime that clings to the naked flesh of the mining child to the point that it nearly obfuscates her gender, Alice’s pinafore wards against potential, rather than actual dirt, as evidenced by Alice’s many adventures having no effect on her clothing whatsoever. Through the pinafore, Alice’s body, physiologically identical to the mining girl, would remain unsullied and clean. To add insult to injury, the pinafore has the added function of being fashionable as an additional layer of clothing with decorative frills and pockets that modestly cover the entire front of her dress.

Another fashion choice that distinguishes Alice as a wealthy child is the length of her skirt, which is enforced by Victorian standards of modesty. Alice’s dress falls to her knees, a style which would be unacceptably provocative on an adult woman. However, to preserve her young modesty, Alice wears a wealth of petticoats under the skirt while stockings cover the length of Alice’s legs. Every other part of her body, with the exception of her neck and arms, is covered in fabric. Additionally, the full skirt and petticoats express the expectation that even girls as young as seven should be subject to the whims of fashionable propriety, regardless of how cumbersome or counterintuitive they are for actual play.

The extent to which Alice is associated with the Victorian era is reflected through the only slight variations in her appearance in her next two books (Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There, which was published in 1871, and The Nursery Alice, which was
published in 1890). Although the three dresses are almost identical, Looking Glass Alice wears striped stockings and the skirt of her dress is narrower and sports a beribboned bustle in the back (Carroll 142-143). This minor style update, limited only to the back of Alice’s dress, suggests that fashion was considered important enough in Alice’s appearance as a well-to-do female child that she should be dressed in accordance to the latest trend. With all three publications and all three dresses bearing the standards, ideals, and styles of the Victorian era, all three of Alice’s incarnations, despite their variations, mark Alice as a strictly Victorian child.

Although Alice’s dress was relatively standardized, the colors of Alice’s dress had yet to be unified. Part of the reason for this phenomenon was the source material. Neither of the first two books offers any detail with regard to color in text or in the illustration. It wasn’t until the 1890 publication of The Nursery Alice that Alice appeared in color (Cohen 129). This first Carroll-authorized polychrome Alice is blonde and wears a yellow dress with navy blue stockings (Carroll 1890, 4). However, this was by no means the only color combination open to Alice in the literary sphere. Following Alice in Wonderland’s copyright expiration in 1907, there was an explosion of Alice in Wonderland publications that featured Alice in an array of colors: yellow, red, dark orange, and the expected, now-iconic blue (Burstein 28). While the number of variations signal to the significance of Alice as a literary figure and a character, the variety of colors suggests that the illustrations Tenniel provided as an original 1865 publication functioned as a modifiable template and that her appearance had not solidified into a single iconic look.

The consolidation of Alice “looks” into a single image would not occur until 1951 with the release of Disney’s animated film Alice in Wonderland. It is worth noting at this juncture that despite its British narrative, the production of this particular interpretation, as with other Disney productions, was American. And as one of the two aforementioned “quintessential Alice
costumes,” it is worth describing Disney’s Alice at greater length. Disney’s Alice wears a knee-length blue dress with a large skirt and petticoats. Rather than a pinafore, this version of Alice wears a white apron (with white pockets that disappear when her hands are not in them) that ties into a neat, white bow at the small of her back. Her accessories include a black headband, white stockings, and black Mary Jane shoes. The costume itself is familiar, as it is the one that is most recognizable to contemporary American audiences. Before discussing the ideological implications of Disney Alice’s clothing when it was produced, it would be useful at this juncture to discuss the changes in fashion since The Nursery Alice, where we last left Alice’s image. For now, it is enough to note that Disney Alice’s dress is still recognizably Victorian.

Women’s fashion underwent a number of significant changes in the 60-plus years between The Nursery Alice and Disney’s Alice in Wonderland.\(^5\) Ann Beth Presley’s research is particularly helpful with this analysis of early-twentieth-century women’s fashion in that it explicitly maps the cultural and political shifts in American history and ties them to concurrent fashion trends. As Presley argues, women’s clothing trends reflected social expectations of acceptable behavior and activity (323). In the late Victorian era, women were expected to be queens of their domestic domain, kept close to the home and relatively inactive (Presley 307). Fashion in the tail end of the Victorian era was therefore as restrictive as women’s social roles. Corsets and bodices were tight and while skirts were full, the silhouette of the skirt was narrow and close to the body. However, in the early- to mid-twentieth century, clothing trends allowed for looser clothing, appropriate for greater mobility and comfort, just as women were integrating into the political sphere and the workforce in ever increasing capacities (Presley 309-310).

Those fashion trends, however, would undergo a sudden shift in the early 1950s once an excess of men became available for jobs and women were once again discouraged from the
workplace (Presley 318-320, 322-323). I refer here to fashion’s return to constricting clothing as a response to the homecoming of men from the warfront, which forced the relocation of women back into the domestic sphere and away from their former places of employment. Fifties fashion would therefore popularize highly structured underclothes, dramatic silhouettes, as well as petticoats and their resulting full skirts (all of which resulted in restricted movement and finicky, maintenance-intensive dress), while popular discourse marketed these changes as a return to femininity. In other words, the fifties in America marked a return to the style of clothing and thinking that was reminiscent of the late Victorian period. However, given the relative freedom in earlier decades, this return to constrictive clothing had to be couched in the terms of greater femininity, gentility, and class, in order to make it desirable.

Alice’s costume is therefore significant insofar as it superficially signifies Victorianism, not as a historical period so much as an ideological conceit to recode femininity as domesticity. Disney Alice’s fashion, of both 1951 and Victorian England, was just similar enough to be recognizable and charming as Tenniel Alice’s dress, but also clearly dated and positioned as British (especially when considering the fashion of the Wonderland Court with the White Rabbit’s neck ruff and the Queen’s late Victorian dress). However, there is a clear but subtle shift in her superficially Victorian clothing (when compared against Tenniel-Alice) that suggests some adherence to styles that are specific to the 1950s. Disney Alice’s wide skirt and petticoats are reminiscent of the full, knee-high circle skirt that came into prominence in the fifties, but those same articles of clothing are also part of Alice’s traditional Victorian appeal. The allure of implied femininity in Alice’s fashion in the case of both Disney’s animated adaptation and Tenniel’s original illustrations, it signified an uncomplicated social expectation for domesticity.
It is noticeable, in fact, that rather than a decorative pinafore with pretty frills, Disney Alice is dressed in a plain, white apron. This stands in stark contrast to the Victorian pinafore and its cultural context of idealized purity. This apron appears to serve only as an accessory, rather than formal leisurewear for wealthy children. Stripped of its culturally specific and functional purpose, the pinafore becomes an apron, signifying the home and the domestic sphere, but more importantly, the kitchen, in a way that the dainty pinafore did not.

This change is due to the fact that Disney’s Alice does not share the same idealized purity of her predecessors. She was produced in an ideologically similar, but distinct and different cultural and historical context. It is therefore unsurprising that Disney’s American Alice maintained her Victorian appearance, while divorced from the ideological trappings of her British background. She was no longer an ideal figurehead of innocent British girlhood, but rather, she became a simplified symbol of girlishness itself, outside of a specific historical context while mirroring the fashions and ideologies of Disney Alice’s time.

This vague understanding of Alice’s clothing as simply older reflects the relative unimportance of the specific period from which Alice hails. The potential temporal dissonance brought on by the trendiness of the Alice dress is resolved through her setting. As the choice of the Wonderland dress (over the Looking Glass dress) suggests, the particular decade isn’t as important as the idea that the fashion, the Wonderland monarchy, and the British accent all point to a setting that is as old as long, long ago.

The new interpretation of Alice as old and vaguely Victorian, rather than pure, or girlish, or specifically late-Victorian, was the final step in solidifying Alice’s template into a costume. The stream of multi-colored Alices dressed in all the shades of the rainbow could only exist in the popular consciousness in that brief period following the expiration of her copyright. This was
because she was, at the time, recognizably only a little girl. She was dressed like any other girl-child and could wear any color she pleased, and would not necessarily be recognizable as anything other than a child. However, by the mid-twentieth century, Alice’s dress was no longer “just a girl’s dress,” but a girl’s dress from a much earlier age. Specifically, it was Alice’s dress. As such, the release of Disney’s *Alice in Wonderland* not only brought Alice onto movie screens, but it also disseminated Alice’s dress as an identifiable costume. From 1951 and onward, Alice would be clothed in, and associated with, a blue dress and white apron.

In our present moment, Alice’s clothing, as it is translated into contemporary Halloween costumes, manifests other interests; Alice is explicitly sexy in a way that Peter traditionally hasn’t been. It is important to note at this juncture that although there is no specific attribution to the Walt Disney company for these particular costumes, each character costume is clearly an homage to (if not an outright duplication of) the “original” Disney animated template. Now, although the continued sexual objectification of women in all forms of visual media plays a role in the sexy interpretation of the Alice costume, that alone does not explain the Alice phenomenon. Even when compared with other sexualized Disney princesses, the Alice Halloween costume, despite its template, is more fluid in its various interpretations.

A direct comparison with another Disney protagonist in blue may be instructive here. Cinderella’s dress pattern remains remarkably consistent across styles of Halloween costumes while Alice’s diverges wildly. Cinderella, much like the other classic Disney princesses, has two popular patterns—her princess dress is either Disney-canon and replicated as closely as possible (Cinderella’s in particular involves a simple ball gown with capped sleeves that is entirely powder blue, blue-and-silver, or white adorned with a white peplum, along with long white evening gloves), or it is a sexy adaptation of the Disney gown in that the hemline falls
scandalously to the wearer’s mid-thigh. Some of the Cinderella costumes might adjust the bust of the costume somewhat, but the pattern and style of the dress is more-or-less preserved (although a few details of the dress are somewhat flexible in their interpretation such as the inclusion of a choker that is either blue or black, or the sleeves, which are capped or puffed).

Alice’s Halloween costume, meanwhile, tends to be even shorter than Cinderella’s and embellished. While the color scheme and fabric patterns align with the Alice aesthetic (red/black, white/black, blue/white, black/blue, checkered or striped), Alice costumes tend to involve extra trappings (lace, decorative Wonderland-themed embroidery, card suit patterns), some of which are explicitly sexual (exposed garters, fishnet stockings, exterior corset, visible petticoats, etc.) when compared to other Disney character costumes.

The specific details of Alice’s dress are remarkably fluid and that distinction separates her costume from those of the other bona fide Disney princesses. However, the distinguishing feature that sets Alice apart from the listed characters is not nobility, but age. Cinderella’s gown, in accordance to her character, is locked at permanent adulthood. Therefore the sexy Cinderella costume is meant for a woman much like Cinderella herself. In fact, Cinderella is such an adult that she wears opera gloves (an accessory denied to most children due to their expense and use as items of elegance for extravagant occasions).

Alice has not yet grown up. She does not have an official adult dress. This costumed ellipsis leaves room for an adult interpretation of what Alice could one day grow up to wear. Alice’s adult costume, unlike Cinderella’s, can change based on how one imagines her future: innocent and sweet or lewd and mad. There is no visual precedent to abide by, and therefore, the costume is allowed to be as fluid and full of promise as the youthful Alice.
The flexibility of the Alice costume is underscored by Alice’s wardrobe in her most recent mainstream film adaptation, Tim Burton’s 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*. And interestingly enough, this fluidity is marked not only by the Alice dress, but also by her parade of dresses. As the film progresses, Alice grows in and out of dresses and is supplied with newer and newer ones, with each dress conforming to Alice aesthetics and coloring (the Burton film also set a large wardrobe precedent for Alice that was continued by the Alice from ABC’s *Once Upon a Time in Wonderland*, a TV series broadcast in 2013). Burton’s interpretation of the classic Alice dress, however, is familiar enough, but has its own distinctly Burton-esque aesthetic.

Burton’s Alice wears an appropriately modest ankle-length blue dress bordered with black embroidery. Her sleeves, in true Alice style, are short and puffy. This dress has a floor-length skirt full with petticoats. Despite Alice’s relatively close adherence to the fashion standards of Victorian propriety, she does not wear a corset under her dress as part of her personal rebellion against the social restrictions of the Victorian aristocracy. Also, as Burton’s adaptation features an older seventeen-year-old Alice, this Alice lacks the requisite pinafore. In fact, she lacks an apron of any kind.

However, as refreshing as that change might be, Alice still clings to the remnants of her Victorian past. Despite her nearly adult age and (within the film) constantly discussed beauty, this Alice does not initiate or engage in an intimate relationship with any of the male characters. It is not for lack of trying, as men in and out of Wonderland (Hamish, the Mad Hatter, the Knave of Hearts) have made their intentions towards her quite plain. Even though her body suggests that she has outgrown the need for childhood innocence, it is maintained until the very end, simultaneously frustrating and inspiring fans to race to their computers to compose alternate romantic endings through fan fiction that finally bring Alice into conclusive full adulthood.
A Boy But One-Day-Old

Peter Pan also has a current iconic look that is the result of numerous costume changes over the years. Despite the cultural expectation that Peter is dressed in a belted green tunic with ragged ends and green tights, the original Peter was never really dressed at all. In his first appearance as a supporting character in *The Little White Bird*, Peter spends almost all of his time naked. Much of the following discussion of Peter Pan as a literary character positions *The Little White Bird* within the Victorian era. This is a contestable choice insofar as it was published in 1902, one year into the Edwardian era. However, Barrie’s birth, childhood and maturation into adulthood took place within the Victorian age. Additionally, Barrie published this first Peter story at the fully-grown age of 42.

The first of Peter’s adventures begins when he, as an ordinary boy, flies out of his bedroom dressed only in his nightgown. Upon landing on an island in Kensington Gardens, Peter suffers from an identity crisis and cannot recall if he is a boy or a bird. Eventually, he takes on the role of a “Betwixt-and-Between,” a half-bird and half-boy, and gives up clothing altogether (TLWB). The nudity here is significant in that during the Victorian period, the state of undress was a complex arena for warring ideologies of colonialism, civilization, savagery, art, childhood, and innocence.

As Robson’s miners suggest, during this period there was a deep shame associated with nakedness that was often coupled with implications or evidence of poverty and carnality. In a paper on the Western (specifically Victorian) ideological differentiation of nudity from nakedness, Philippa Levine reveals the constructed binary that codes nudes as high art and photographs of naked savages as scientific and sociological research. She summarizes one of her main arguments: “Lacking history, lacking shame, lacking clothes, the native epitomized the
absence of civilization, just as the nude of Victorian art epitomized an ideal of pure femininity—
both timeless constructs mired in nostalgia for an imagined past” (196). This difference, then,
was in the Western woman’s ability to disrobe for the sake of a higher cause (such as art), rather
than in her ignorance of how clothing functions.

This paradoxically differentiated reception of nudity has a simple resolution in that both
Western women and colonized peoples were considered lacking in comparison to Western men.
Levine rightly notes that both groups were made subjects of photographs in the nude in a way
that Western men were not. This shared condition suggested to her that “[w]omen […] and
natives were closer to nature than the men who constructed the colonial world of the nineteenth
century, and their portrayal without clothing served to underline that association” (199). Ideas of
nakedness and nudity were thereby infused with conceptualizations of Western colonial
superiority and also masculine superiority (as viewer) over women (as viewed).

To make Peter, a young boy, intentionally remove his own clothing and choose to live a
carelessly nude life is to then suggest his removal from civilization, but also his superiority to
other naked bodies. Therefore, this societal distance and absence of clothing are not to be
confused with true savagery, ignorance, poverty, or lack, but are indicative of Peter’s agency as a
white, Western boy. Barrie is careful to note that “[a]lthough he was now quite naked, you must
not think that he was cold or unhappy.” Once again, Levine’s analysis is instructive: “The
literary cliché of the naked wretch […] has no nude counterpart. Nudes recline, nudes stretch,
nudes beckon: they don’t shiver and they are seldom abject” (191). Peter’s nudity is happy,
playful, and innocent—in other words, coded as child-like and only faintly tinged with a sweet,
fey wildness that hints at the romanticization of childhood innocence during the Victorian era.
After all, as Barrie notes in a conversation with one of the actors who would play him, “[Peter] is a day old” (Hanson 29).

When Peter Pan appears as the star of the aforementioned play years later, Barrie describes him wearing, again, surprisingly little: “In so far as he is dressed at all it is in autumn leaves and in cobwebs” (PP). In *Peter and Wendy*, the novelization of the Peter Pan story, Peter is dressed entirely in skeleton leaves (Barrie 15). Skeleton leaves are long-dead leaves without any pulp, which leave only the veins of the “skeleton” behind. They are delicate and easily destroyed—a point that is emphasized when Wendy first discovers one of Peter’s loose leaves on the windowsill of their nursery. Although the sartorial description for both literary Peters is certainly bare, the ephemeral material indicated in the script and novel signals the careful near-nudity with which this early Peter is clothed.

Stage Peter introduced a new complication to the near-nudity expected of literary Peter Pan. By introducing a physical body into the equation, production had to consider how to maintain a Victorian sensibility in Peter’s wardrobe while also signifying the wild abandon that his role demanded. Despite the expectation that Peter *should* be clothed in delicate leaves or nothing at all, the woman playing Peter would have to appear overtly male in her appearance through her clothing and demeanor, if not her physiology.

It is unsurprising then, that for his first appearance onstage Peter wore a familiar costume consisting primarily of a large tunic and leggings. The costume design sketch for Nina Boucicault (the first actor to play Peter Pan) in 1904, reproduced in black and white, shows an image of a gender-ambiguous figure with arms outstretched (Hanson 33). In keeping with the current image of Peter Pan, this Peter is clothed in a belted tunic, leggings, and close-fitting shoes. While this image bears a close resemblance to later Peters, this iteration sports several key
differences, one of which is a cap made of sewn-together leaves (or a fabric with uneven, symmetrical ridges on its hem). A similar pattern of leaves adorns Peter’s shoulders and shoes and his leggings are reminiscent of closely woven scales (or layers of small leaves). Full-length sleeves extend from under the tunic and sport large, horizontal stitches down the forearms. The most immediate difference between this outfit and our contemporary conceptualization of Peter is two cobwebs that stretch from the ends of Peter’s arms down to his waist, reminiscent of wingsuits or flying squirrels. Overall, the costume is in keeping with Barrie’s direction: autumn leaves and cobwebs.

The costume itself is remarkable in its parallel development of Alice’s. Like Alice’s costume, this first costume has additional flourishes (leaf-cap, cobweb wings vs. pocketed pinafore and bustle) that have since been simplified or removed altogether. Later productions would remove the cobwebs and de-emphasize the leaf patterns, leaving only the belted leggings and tunic untouched. The point of departure for Peter’s costume in this comparison is the introduction of cross-dressing for only Peter’s character. In fact, the overwhelming majority of actors who played Peter were women: Nina Boucicault, Maude Adams, Mary Martin, etc. (Hanson). In fact, Maude Adams is the person credited with designing Peter’s signature feathered cap and introducing the Peter Pan collar into women’s fashion (Hanson 62).

Although this gender switch could stand out as odd for a contemporary audience, the majority of the reviewers for Boucicault’s performance make no specific reference to the potential difficulties of an actor playing a cross-gendered role, but wrote accolades to her acting skill as a whole (Hanson 42-43, 48). In this chorus of pleased critics, a rare reviewer registered disbelief at the knowledge that “Peter Pan is in private life a young lady whom I know to have been married for several years” (Hanson 48). However, this disbelief functions as a supplement
to effusive praise as the critic remarks, “I would not sacrifice one line or one gesture of […] Miss Boucicault. [She plays her part] in exactly the right spirit of dainty and amusing make-belief” (Hanson 48). The language of the reviewers is interesting: from “dainty” to “half-fairy” and “exquisite,” the descriptions of Peter skew more towards femininity than masculinity.

Once again, Victorian scholar Catherine Robson’s work is helpful here. Her book, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* discusses Victorian upper-class men and their identification with girlish childhood. In her introduction she explains this phenomenon as follows:

> The idealization and idolization of little girls, long acknowledged features of the Victorian era cannot be thought of without reference to a pervasive fantasy in which men become masculine only after an initial feminine stage. In this light, little girls represent not just the true essence of childhood, but an adult male’s best opportunity of reconnecting with his own lost self (3).

Robson argues this point by discussing Victorian childhood as gender-neutral insofar as children from zero to six wear the same clothing, are watched and educated by the same persons in the home, and generally share the same societal expectations. By Robson’s research, “it was not until the twentieth century that boys, in any of the social classes, would wear obviously gendered clothing before [the] relatively advanced age [of six or seven years old]” (4). She cites the beginning of school and the use of gendered clothing as the end of childhood for men, while women would continue on in similar clothing, in the same space, moored to their homes and the domestic sphere. Robson then uses this gendered differentiation in adulthood to explain why certain key figures during the Victorian era such as John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, and of course, Lewis Carroll, were obsessed with capturing or otherwise accessing the image of pure and
innocent girlhood as an icon of their own lost childhoods. This in turn further substantiates the importance of Peter’s escape to Neverland as a baby, rather than a preadolescent, who during Victorian times, would already be enmeshed in the male sphere.

Another reviewer of the Nina Boucicault version of *Peter Pan* touches on this point, writing, “Mr. Barrie has never grown up. He is still a child, absolutely. But some fairy once waved a wand over him, and changed him from a dear little boy into a dear little girl” (50). Based on Robson’s research, this assertion is not as outlandish as it might seem to a contemporary reader. In fact, Barrie’s supposed girlhood only underscores how much of a child this reviewer imagines Barrie to be. In this case, it is not only Barrie, but also day-old Peter, who can revel in the innocent ignorance of childhood and also gender-transgressive girlhood safely, by virtue of their jointly-imagined youths—Peter through action and Barrie through narrative.

This Victorian interpretation of a girlish childhood helps to explain the relative ease with which people accepted an adult woman playing Peter. After all, not only was the girl the epitome of childhood, but also, to point out the obvious, the societal expectation was that girls would not develop into men as they aged. Therefore, in this case, the actress playing Peter could not grow up, if growing up meant manhood.

The difficulty is therefore not in identifying the Victorian influence within *Peter Pan*, or *The Boy Who Wouldn’t Grow Up*, but rather, it is in identifying the play as Victorian. While the argument could be made that earlier versions of Peter Pan could be considered Victorian based on publication dates alone, the play was first performed in 1904, halfway into the Edwardian age. Although I could reiterate the earlier argument of the playwright’s birth, upbringing, and maturation within the Victorian age, the play is caught in an ideologically significant period in time. Peter’s eventual shift into the Edwardian period had important implications precisely
because this thoroughly Victorian interpretation of girlish boyhood would falter and be overcome by boys reclaiming childhood at the turn of the century. Robson, citing Barrie as one of the proponents of this change, writes in her conclusion, “the boy returned from his long obscurity to be childhood’s supreme representative for the twentieth century” (193). The male-centrism implicit in Robson’s “supreme representative” would come into full bloom in the early 1900s.

This ideological shift is the focus of Gail Bederman’s book *Manliness and Civilization.* In it, she discusses the different forms of American manhood constructed during the late nineteenth-century through to the early twentieth-century. The focus of Bederman’s project is the way in which the dominant ideals of manliness in the 1880s gave way to ideals of masculinity in the early 1900s. Bederman intentionally uses each term to describe a differing set of ideologies to very specific effect (7). As she explains, “The mingled honor, high-mindedness, and strength stemming from […] powerful self-mastery were encapsulated in the term ‘manliness’” (12). This manliness was informed by British Victorian ideals, which in turn, as signifiers of class, played a major role in American middle-class identity. However, according to Bederman’s research, it was that very same manliness that would be threatened in the 1900s by economic stagnation, the rise in popularity of leisure activities, and expansion of the American political sphere to include women and immigrants (12-15). A new order of manhood had to be developed. This concept would be called masculinity and centered on the working-class and blue-collar man who was unrestricted and could access the raw savagery of his primitive ancestors.

The male arena, with warring ideologies of manliness and masculinity, had its influence on Peter’s costume during this time as well. Peter’s future iterations would volley back and forth between the leaves-and-cobwebs of literary Peter (who was more feminine) and tunic-and-leggings of stage Peter (who was androgynous, but more masculine in comparison): Maude
Adams, an American actress and one of the first Peters in 1905 cut an interesting composite figure with two belts and a dagger, and leaf outlines embroidered into her tunic, which was topped by a dissonant white curved collar (the aforementioned Peter Pan collar) (58); Cecilia Loftus, a Scottish actress (employed for Peter’s second theater run in Britain), wore a tunic that used a single baldric as a belt, which simultaneously signified leaves and savagery through layered ragged edges and ripped undershirt (80); Marilyn Miller, an American, in 1924 would sport a collar with uniform, symmetrical “ragged” cuts with no belt or dagger at all (107); and by 1954, Mary Martin’s American Peter wore a green, collared tunic of stitched-together fabric leaves that was belted at the waist, with light green pantyhose (Hanson C-4). While Peter’s actors did their part in keeping his character alive, it was once again Disney animation that solidified and disseminated his unrepentantly male image on a massive scale in 1953.

Interestingly, although it was gender that reinforced the need for a fully clothed female Peter on stage, animation did little to nothing to change Peter’s costume. Although Disney’s Peter Pan was drawn male, he still kept stage Peter Pan’s costume, unlike the revised Alice. The magic of animation could have projected a Peter that was closer to the literary original, but by that point, the audience who would expect and appreciate a girlish, elfin protagonist was gone, and Disney’s influence was strong. From here on out, as with Alice after her Disney adaptation, Peter Pan would be dressed in his Disney costume. Similarly, following this point, Victorian manliness would not have the same ideological hold on America’s cultural construction of manhood again.

A concrete illustration of this point is a comparative analysis of Disney’s interpretation of Peter Pan and Robin Hood. Disney’s Robin Hood was produced in 1973, a full twenty years after Peter Pan. However, there are a surprising number of similarities in the characters’ stories and in
their dress. Both stories feature a British setting and a male protagonist. This protagonist surrounds himself with likeminded individuals of the same gender (although they are greatly reduced in the case of Disney’s *Robin Hood*), and all of them consider themselves outside the laws of society and live in nature. There is a single main female protagonist who tempers the main male protagonist and looks after him. This quality is essential because both protagonists are mercurial, capable of violence, and specialize in the use of a particular weapon.

Given the focus of this chapter, however, the most pertinent and useful point is the similarity in both Peter and Robin’s dress. Both Peter and Robin wear red-feathered green caps. They both also wear green tunics with Peter Pan collars that are fastened in the middle with a piece of leather. They even share the same, form-fitting shoes. However, the slight differences in the two costumes clarify the ideological differences between the two characters. The differences in their costumes, however slight, define Robin Hood’s position as that of a manly adult character, while Peter remains a masculine child.

The belted tunic in particular has several interesting implications. Peter’s waist is cinched with a baldric, which holds his sword in place. Robin’s, however, is a belt with a buckle. The absence of Robin’s weapon on his person lies in stark contrast to the way in which Peter’s weapon is incorporated into his wardrobe. The inclusion of Peter’s weapon hints at violence. Conversely, Robin’s buckle functions to simulate the appearance of adulthood and thereby rationality and calm. This point is underscored by the fact that neither the belt nor the buckle serves a practical purpose, as Robin does not wear pants. Peter wears leggings, while Robin forgoes garments for the lower half of his body altogether. This is not as lewd or shocking as it seems, considering that Robin is an anthropomorphic fox in a lengthy tunic that extends halfway down his thigh.
Additionally, while Robin’s tunic resembles Peter’s, the differences are suggestive. The ends of Peter’s tunic are ragged and not hemmed. With the single exception of his slightly open collar, there isn’t a single straight line in his shirt. Despite Wendy playing house in cozy domestic scenes in Neverland, Peter’s clothing is still unkempt. Like Cecilia Loftus’s tunic, the ragged edges of Peter’s costume simultaneously signify nature and Peter’s removal from civilization. Robin’s tunic, meanwhile, is nothing but straight lines. His tunic is appropriately hemmed and even his collar is stitched up to the neck. The edges of his shirt, like Robin himself, are domesticated in a way that Peter cannot be. In other words, Robin’s clothes suggest a man who, although he may live in the woods, is still very much a domesticated, adult male.

Peter, the untamable, armed, wild boy, is therefore more masculine than Robin, who not only wears the trappings of virtuous adulthood, but also marries Maid Marian (in a similar, but more elaborate tunic with long-sleeves and golden accessories) and plans to have children. Peter, on the other hand, willfully leaves Wendy behind and seeks further adventure in the wild unknown. Peter’s association with nature is also reminiscent of his invulnerability to age. Although certain spaces and times are locked in place, nature is assumed to be beyond civilization and therefore beyond the measure of time itself.

It is also worth noting that Robin speaks with a British-English accent while Peter speaks with an American-English accent. Given the American association of the upper class with British English, Robin is once again coded as more manly than masculine. And while it is true that there are a myriad of potential explanations for why Peter has more cultural cachet in America than Robin Hood (the cultural difference, the lack of resonance of a British folk hero for an American audience, the smaller budget, the duplication of footage from older films, to name a few),
Bederman’s argument for the increasing cultural appreciation for masculinity over manliness in America offers a compelling reason behind Peter’s persistence in American popular culture.

By the time of Peter Pan’s release as a Disney film, Peter stops being a young girl, and becomes a young man who never tires of the wild. In fact, Disney’s widespread dissemination of the Peter Pan narrative (in conjunction with the popularization of film and television over theater as a primary source of entertainment) served to eradicate Peter-as-woman almost entirely from contemporary consciousness. A simple Google Image search of the words “Peter Pan” will result in a parade of male bodies, animated and otherwise. Once animated, Peter stopped being a liminal, gender-ambiguous figure, and became, in the mainstream, a young man.

This point is highlighted by Peter’s sexualization in P.J. Hogan’s recent film adaptation, Peter Pan (2003). Unlike the smaller productions of Peter Pan adaptations from the indie and LGBTQA scene, this mainstream Hollywood Peter is a relatively new incarnation that explores the heteronormative sexualization of Peter Pan as an adolescent boy with burgeoning feelings for an adolescent girl. In this particular adaptation, thirteen-year old Jeremy Sumpter plays Peter. He is dressed somewhere between literary Peter and stage Peter, with a string of leaves and vines intersecting on his bare chest and leafy pants that end at his knees.

However, this half-nudity does not suggest a return to a Victorian celebration of childhood purity, but rather celebrates Peter as an adolescent boy on the cusp of manhood, charming and desired by an appropriately aged, equally adolescent, Wendy. Although there is an enchanting innocence in their interactions, there is also an undercurrent of youthful desire that serves as the impetus for Wendy’s wish to grow up. Peter’s bare chest is simultaneously reminiscent of Levine’s nudes while also signaling Peter’s potential for a more developed engagement with a heterosexual partner. This contemporary objectification of Peter Pan is an
interesting development in Peter’s overall evolution as a character and is indicative of the increasing demands put on young men by society to meet stricter standards of masculine beauty.

The Dress of Imagined Victorians

Both Peter and Alice are dated articulations of childhood that have remained not only culturally relevant, but fresh. With new adaptations coming out almost annually and renewing their image in the public eye, their popular appeal is undeniable. With each successive adaptation adding its own layer of meaning and ideological interpretation to the cultural index of Peter and Alice, by 2014 both characters have acquired, discarded, and accumulated dozens of codes of dress in accordance to the cultural ideologies current to their adaptations.

Alice’s transition from page to screen, to stage, to everywhere, is marked by an appreciation of girlhood. In the Victorian period, as a literary character, she was a pure ideal, a happy, innocent haven from the rest of the world. Her transition into animation streamlined her image and disseminated it across countries and decades, stitching it into our cultural fabric as a figure from another time, domestic, quaint, somewhat Victorian, and somehow nostalgic. However, unlike earlier iterations of Alice as a little girl, the more recent adaptations of Alice (such as Tim Burton’s Alice in Wonderland film) subverts the Victorian impulse to protect and preserve her innocence by aging Alice into womanhood and remaking her as an object of desire.

Peter has a similarly checkered development as he moved from the page, to the stage, and back again before he manifested his own iconic costume as a Disney animation. Literary Peter begins as a nearly naked child, an absolute Victorian innocent. With the addition of clothes, Peter was aged enough to be recognizably masculine, dapper and young to reflect the growing significance and power of his gender. From an ambiguous fairy figure, Peter finally becomes, in
his 2003 film, a masculine boy (and almost man) who has the potential to inspire less-than-innocent adolescent desires for adulthood.

Together, Peter and Alice are childhood gender ideologies made fictional flesh. The following chapter will discuss the thematic loci of contemporary adaptations for Peter and Alice in films and novels to discuss in greater detail the significance of Peter and Alice in our current moment.
CHAPTER II: 
CURIously FAMILIAR AND NEWLY STRANGE WONDERLAND & NEVERLAND: THEN, NOW, AND MOVING FORWARD

In the previous chapter, I discussed the material culture of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland as gendered representations of childhood and children’s play. This chapter will examine three critical points in the development of Alice and Peter narratives to consider the changes in their reception as these stories and their adaptations move from a place of communion, to a place of wonder, before finally becoming a paradoxical space of simultaneous familiarity and oddity. In addition, I argue that the facilitation and enjoyment of these narratives is informed by an imperialist worldview that saturates the cultural productions contemporary to the source texts Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Peter Pan, although that connection becomes less visible, but no less important, in later adaptations. Under the guise of playful children’s fantasy, this nonthreatening imperialist worldview plays an important role in the continuing significance of these narratives to our contemporary moment.

The preliminary research on this chapter was spurred on by a nagging question: Why, in 2014—now over a century removed from the initial publication of both Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and the first Peter Pan novel—do we continue to be invested in not just telling these stories about Victorian childhood, but also in re-telling, and re-presenting these stories in perpetuity? The two most recent mainstream Hollywood adaptations of these tales, rather than providing an answer, only confuse matters further.

P.J. Hogan’s 2003 Peter Pan begins, like so many other adaptations, with a familiar scene: four children, three in nightclothes, flying over the rooftops of sleepy Victorian London. The leader of this raggedy troupe zips across the screen dressed in nothing but leaves, vines, and leaf-patched shorts. The others follow him in quick succession, flying up past Big Ben’s face,
then further upwards, past the stratosphere and into space. Chained in succession with each child grabbing the ankle of the one before him (or her), they fly faster and faster as the dotted stars around them blur into lines. With a burst of light, they arrive. Having gone second to the right and straight on ‘til morning, the children fly over the reflective surface of the sea towards Neverland.

As the above scene suggests, with a few minor, contemporary touches such as the star-lines borrowed from the warp-speed travel of science fiction, the adaptation cleaves closely to both our contemporary expectations of Peter Pan and to its literary predecessor. Like the play on which it is based, Peter Pan (2003) follows the story of a little girl named Wendy who flies away to Neverland with her brothers in tow, following a fairy boy who never wants to grow up. Although the story was familiar, the film was generally well received as a quality adaptation (Rotten Tomatoes). In reviews of the film, critics and fans alike mention its fidelity to the source material. In fact, the film opens with lines from the original novel itself: “All children grow up / except one” (Barrie 13).

In contrast, I offer the following scene from Tim Burton’s Alice in Wonderland (2010): On an enormous checkerboard that doubles as a battlefield, white chess soldiers and red card legionnaires jab at each other with spears and swords. Central to the action is a blonde warrior woman in a full suit of armor gripping her sword and battling her way up a crumbling stone tower, hounded by a shrieking black dragon. The red-eyed dragon has a dark, rumbling voice and a forked tongue that flicks in and out of its mouth like a snake. It shoots lightning from its maw and pounds the ground with the full weight of its wings and claws as swathes of black smoke swirl around its body. In the heat of battle, the dragon makes a critical error and flings the
woman up towards the sky. “Off with your head!” she exclaims as she falls back down and slices through the dragon’s neck in one clean swing.

Although there are a few hints in the description—the cards, the chess pieces, the woman with blonde hair, and the telling, “Off with your head”—it isn’t immediately apparent that the previous scene comes from an Alice in Wonderland adaptation. After all, why should it be? Carroll’s Alice was a little girl and while Wonderland might have been full of surprises and even dangers on occasion, wars, large-scale battles, and dragons certainly weren’t among them. This particular film is Tim Burton’s sequel-cum-adaptation titled *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). It features a 19-year old Alice Kingsley on a return trip to Wonderland, a bizarre place that she once visited as a child, which she’d long believed to be a dream. Although reviews of Burton’s adaptation do not have as positive a tone when compared to Hogan’s, the 2010 film managed to earn over $1 billion, becoming the fifteenth highest grossing film of all time, as well as win two Academy Awards for Art Direction and Costume design, while *Peter Pan* earned back its $100 million budget only after it was released internationally, and by the slimmest of margins (Box Office Mojo).

Now this is something of a paradox and calls into question what contemporary audiences want from these adaptations. Hogan’s Peter was more critically acclaimed, had better reviews, and was truer to its source materials but it only just barely managed to break even. Burton’s Alice, on the other hand, was derided as inauthentic spectacle that took enormous liberties with the source material and was richly rewarded. This comparison condenses and simplifies several complicated factors that go into measuring the success of a film (such as the cultural capital of the industry professionals involved in both films, the competition during release dates—for instance, the highly anticipated *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* opened a week prior to
*Peter Pan*—or the marketing), but the comparison of Burton and Hogan’s adaptations raises an interesting question: Why did Alice succeed where Peter failed? In order to answer that question, we must return to the one I posed near the beginning of the chapter, which I repeat again here: why do Alice and Peter adaptations persist in our contemporary moment?

My investigation begins with the original *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* in order to discern why and how these texts were able to connect to late Victorians and Edwardians and thereby gain the cultural capital that would project them into the future as classic children’s literature. Using Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on the carnivalesque and Victor Turner’s concept of communitas to consider Alice and Peter respectively, I argue that the key to Alice and Peter’s prominence in Victorian literature is due to the strong sense of cultural and temporal unity they engender in their contemporary audience as well as their underlying themes of imperialist superiority.

My next site of investigation will be the Disney animated films of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. Given the importance of context in the written (and performed, in Peter’s case) source texts, Disney’s animated films present a complication in that their focus is not on Victorian England or representations of Victorian childhood so much as it is on presenting visual spectacle. Contrasting the Disney films with contemporary mainstream Hollywood adaptations of Alice and Peter (Burton 2010 and Hogan 2003), I argue that this emphasis on visual spectacle at the expense of social and historical context has been incorporated into our contemporary understanding of these narratives. Using Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle, I analyze the role these animated Disney films have played in creating visual conventions specific to each text that speak to oddity, not reference.
Finally, I end with a comparative look at the Hollywood adaptations in conjunction with two additional contemporary adaptations of Peter and Alice, the SyFy cable network miniseries *Neverland* (2011) and *Alice* (2009, both of which are directed by Nick Willing). I argue that in our contemporary moment, Peter and Alice narratives have become simultaneously more and less familiar in an attempt to visually represent and maintain the ever-developing cultural index of Alice and Peter conventions while also introducing increasing levels of oddity in order to preserve the spectacular spirit that has become synonymous with these titles. This section applies Sven Lütticken’s concept of Imperial Now-Time to Alice and Peter adaptations as contemporary representations of the Victorian era in order to consider Peter and Alice adaptations not only as representations clothed in history, but also as imperialist texts with pretensions of innocence. Imperial Now-Time is a way to understand the increasing contemporary fetishization of the Victorian era as an ahistorical time that is evocative, pleasurable, and undeniably imperialistic. *Carnival Canon and Communitas*

To begin answering this question about adaptations and the persistence of Alice and Peter, it would be prudent to start our investigation with the first texts. Although the original literary versions of *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* were separated by almost half a century, at the time of their publication, they were evocative texts because they were of their times. The childhood, childish desires, and lifestyles that these texts evoked were memorable and compelling because they touched upon a profoundly Victorian (and Edwardian) sensibility and understanding of childhood—not only for the enchanted children, but for their wistful parents as well.

Part of the pleasure that Victorian audiences would have derived from reading *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is delighting in Alice’s incomplete understanding of the rules of
Victorian society. Although she is savvy to what constitutes decorous behavior during the Victorian era, she does not yet know the purpose of those rules (and in fact, Carroll seems to suggest that these intricate social niceties have no true purpose to begin with). Despite her status as a novice to Victorian high society, Alice still strives to enforce Victorian social mores on herself as well as onto the seemingly lawless denizens of Wonderland. The ongoing dialogue of proper Victorian manners, misunderstanding, maladaptation of good form, and failed, misspoken correction is part of what made the original tales so charming.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque is a particularly helpful concept to elucidate the pleasures of reading Alice. Taking the idea of the carnival, a time in which hierarchal structure and all forms of inequality are leveled, Bakhtin’s carnivalesque (as it is used in this thesis) describes a literary form that understands and does away with social inequality through the unification of binary oppositions, usually with regard to social class, in addition to “the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (Bakhtin 251). In Bakhtin’s terms, “[all] distance between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: free and familiar contact among people” (251). What allows this free and familiar contact is the temporary suspension of what he calls “hierarchical structure and all forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it” (251). This suspension, however, has a precondition of foreknowledge insofar as people must be aware of these boundaries before they are able to reject them.

Therefore there is a slight complication in applying this term to Alice in that as a child character, she does not completely understand the ins and outs of the rules that govern society. However, I am not using the idea of the carnivalesque in this case to describe Alice’s relationship with the world and structure of Wonderland, but rather, the relationship that Alice’s
contemporaries would have had with her story as a text that is not necessarily transgressive, but certainly flirting with the boundaries of social expectation. In fact, the oddity of Wonderland and its inability to conform to rules even speaks to the carnivalesque fascination with eccentricity in that “[e]ccentricity is a special category of familiar contact; it permits—in concretely sensuous form—the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves” (Bakhtin 251). This cited familiarity is responsible for creating an expectation on the part of the reader that he or she will recognize the presence of the carnivalesque inherent in Alice in Wonderland as an attempt to amuse. After all, the book was initially written to relieve the boredom of three small girls on a boating trip.

Similarly, several of Alice’s actions, which might seem rational and reasonable to audiences today, are highly unorthodox or altogether rude for a child of her era. In one particularly amusing scene in the chapter “The Pig and the Pepper,” when Alice encounters a frog doorman who is idling by his door, rather than at his post, she spends an inordinate amount of time agonizing over how she is to enter the premises. After several moments of hinting to the doorman of his duties, she eventually gives in and tries the door on her own. It opens without a problem, and she goes in. Although her course of action may seem logical, it goes against the basic understanding of manners at the time (that one must wait to be announced by a doorman when calling at a home that employs a doorman)—and speaks to the frustrations of the kind of strictly enforced social and class boundaries that the Victorian period was built upon. Although the imagery is nonsensical (for instance, earlier in the scene, a frog and fish footman bow to each other so deeply that their wigs get entangled), the social frustrations that are explored in the self-conscious ridicule of formality are real.
Other forms of the topsy-turvy carnivalesque abound in Alice: a self-consciously doubled Alice chides herself about acting like a “great girl” and demanding that she stop crying while she cries (Carroll 121); Alice is called on to run errands for a rabbit (38); didactic poems full of elderly wisdom become, unbeknownst to Alice, nonsensical mocking verse in her mouth (49n3); the Duchess boxes the Queen’s ears (84); a recipe using a combination of common ingredients justifies the appearance of a monstrous chimera (94n10); and the King is outsmarted and corrected by a child (120). In all of these cases, the lines between high and low are blurred. The serious is mocked and parodied as ridiculous. The ridiculous is serious while the grotesque is tragic. These few examples are all taken from Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and do not account for the numerous puns, playful language, and authoritative—and thoroughly incorrect—definitions that Carroll scatters throughout the text for the amusement of the knowing reader.

There is a similar tension between the appropriate and inappropriate, respect and irreverence, modesty and brazenness in Peter Pan. However, as the majority of Peter’s story takes place in Neverland, a place presumably removed from society, there is less of an occasion for outright transgressive behavior. It is an odd, in-between space that is home to a variety of strange creatures, the most familiar of which are fairies, crocodiles, pirates, Indians, Lost Boys, and mermaids. Although the juxtaposition of fairy and crocodile or pirate and Indian may be considered odd, a closer examination of the nature of Neverland offers an explanation.

According to Barrie,

Neverland is always more or less an island, with 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. It would be an easy map if that were all; but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers, the round pond, needlework, murders, hangings, verbs that take the dative, chocolate pudding day, [...] and so on, and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still (19).

In simpler terms, Barrie’s Neverland encapsulates and manifests the whole of childhood experience from the quotidian to imaginative wonder. This is the place where imagined play comes to life.

As the above excerpt proposes, Barrie’s Neverland is made up of those objects, events, characters, and settings that loom largest in the visiting children’s imagination. And in fact, later adaptations preserve this line-up faithfully: pirates and Indians, fairies, and at least one bloodthirsty ticking crocodile. However, it should be noted that these choices are a reflection of their time. As such, these imaginative choices are not spun from nothing. The choices are deliberate, exact, and chosen for their evocative quality; they are part and parcel of the experience of imaginary play in Victorian and Edwardian England at the time of Peter Pan’s initial release.

Robert H. MacDonald notes in his book *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism (1880-1918)*, that young children, particularly young boys, were saturated with imperialist ideology at the turn of the century. In his chapter about popular fiction, MacDonald rightly argues that, “The enormous body of fiction produced for boys between 1880 and 1920 – and after – has to be understood in this context of a masculinist ideology” (209).

With stories like Jules Verne’s *Around the World in 80 Days* (1870), Robert Louis Stevenson’s
Treasure Island (1883), Rudyard Kipling’s The Jungle Book (1894), Arthur Conan Doyle’s Lost World (1912), and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s Tarzan (1912) (to offer just a small selection of examples still recognizable today), there was a rush of children’s adventure fiction emphasizing the thrill for British men of seeking their fortunes in the wild unknown.

As my previous chapter argued, part of this valorization of adventure has to do with the increasing cultural cache of masculinity over manliness. This masculinist impulse was further exacerbated when combined with an all-too-real imperial agenda. MacDonald’s insight is once again helpful here,

By the end of the nineteenth century middle-class boys reading the fictions of adventure were necessarily caught up in the program of empire. The constructions of the imperial yarns mirrored the “real” world, that place where “men of action” performed the “real” work of exploration and conquest (205).

It is no surprise then, that during this same period of real imperial expansion, there would be a boyhood fascination for savage “natives,” pirates, and lush, uncharted territories yet to be explored (along with the implicit suggestion that these places have yet to be conquered and “civilized”) that would find its expression in Peter Pan. Although these imperialist desires were not an exclusively British phenomenon—after all, Verne was French and Burroughs was American—this profusion of imperialist fiction stemming from Britain and resonating with fiction from other countries gestures towards the ease with which Victorian Peter was integrated and adapted abroad. (This imperialist desire also applies to Alice, although I will discuss this subject at length in a later section).

For the first two decades of Peter Pan’s run, the children represented in the play and the children in the audience (as well as the former children in the audience) were on the same page
when it came to what was considered thrilling or exciting, just as adventure was identically
signified through dangerous creatures (the mermaid lagoon, morally ambiguous fairies, flesh-
eating crocodiles) and armed adversaries (pirates and Indians). There was no need to explain
their appearance because they were time-locked signs of imagination and fun (after all, the
choices of inhabitants are erratic and don’t fall in line with any form of geographical logic as
most species of crocodiles are not indigenous to America, although Barrie’s native “redskins”
presumably are, and the infamous James Hook was schooled in Eton). However, the unity of
mind, heart, and spirit gestures towards a larger understanding of shared humanity, which can be
more fully explored through Victor Turner’s concept of communitas.

Although Turner’s writing in “Liminality and Communitas” is primarily concerned with
the idea of liminality in rites of passage, communitas exists in both secular and religious society
and is what binds society together amidst the temporary breakdown presented in the liminal
period. As Turner writes, “We are presented […] with a ‘moment in and out of time,’ and in and
out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition […] of a
generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a
multiplicity of structural ties” (96). While Turner’s work is concerned with studying primarily
what he calls kinship-based societies, it more generally refers to those intense feelings of
community derived from being engaged in a shared suspension of societal roles and identities,
which is illustrated in the following statement: “For me, communitas emerges where social
structure is not” (126). That brief transcendence of social boundaries described by Turner in his
paper, however, could just as easily be used to describe the theater. In fact, Turner himself later
investigated theater as a potential expression of secular ritual, in the sense that it is a
performative, self-reflexive genre that monitors the common sense processes of its audience (“Process, System, and Symbol” 71-75).

One beautiful example of communitas from Peter Pan in the theater is an anecdote from its very first performance, as retold by biographer Andrew Birkin. For Peter Pan’s opening run, Barrie was very concerned about one scene in particular. In it, Nina Boucicault, as Peter Pan, calls on the audience to clap if they believe in fairies to save Tinkerbell’s life. “The elite of London’s society with few children among them” were the first to watch the performance, so the playwright worried that the sophisticated audience of high society adults would be unmoved (Birkin 116). As a precaution, Barrie directed the musicians in the orchestra pit to set aside their instruments and clap if the audience failed to respond. However, as it turns out, his request was unnecessary. “When Nina Boucicault turned to the distinguished gatherings and begged their belief in fairies, the response was so overwhelming that she burst into tears” (Birkin 117). In that moment, regardless of class, age, or gender, the audience came together in a cohesive, shared moment of deep sincerity born from the desire to save an impossible figment of childhood. It was powerful, moving, and very profitable. In fact, Maude Adams, the most prominent American actress to play Peter Pan, performed as Peter for over two million people by the end of her career.

Peter Pan developed droves of fans, impacting adults and children alike. It spoke to the fancies and fantasies of the time, playing with the presentation of innocent and harmless children’s adventures without consequence. And when the play moved abroad, it enjoyed even greater success as Peter’s irrepressible desire for independence, freedom, and adventure struck a chord in the New World. “[American] [c]hildren […] like their English peers, contented themselves with falling in love with Peter and pined to fly away with him and indulge
themselves in killing off pirates” (Birkin 126). Peter Pan mania took the world by storm, influencing children’s names and clothing and becoming a household staple.

Perhaps because of Peter’s influence in America, even now, more than a century removed from his debut, most people assume that they understand Peter Pan. This assumption is associated with a superficial understanding of the underlying theme of Peter Pan, the desire to stay young forever. Oddly, this desire to stay a child elides the fact that this is a desire born of culture, rather than psychology or biology. This impulse, in other words, is positioned as a “natural” part of childhood. This neatly ignores the fact that childhood is a contemporary ideological construct that refers to a stage of human development that has only been identified as a stage of human development for a relatively short period of time.

To help contextualize this point, I turn to a chapter from Allison James and Alan Prout’s seminal work, Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood. According to James and Prout, sociologist Philippe Ariés famously argued that the idea of childhood did not exist in medieval times (16). While his argument remains contentious and the applicability of his methodology to actual history is questionable, his work is significant insofar as it denies the universality of childhood experience and gestures towards the constructed nature of childhood (James and Prout 16). A far more reasonable claim (and Ariés rebuttal) comes from Linda Pollock who not only argues that the expectation that medieval understandings of childhood should match contemporary Western expectations was indefensible, but also reasonably notes that at the very least, particular forms of childhood are historically specific (James and Prout 17). Therefore, although there is some dispute as to how childhood is understood in our contemporary moment against how childhood was understood in the past, it is generally accepted that childhood as a
whole, and our contemporary understanding of childhood, is a historically bound social
construction.

In fact, although childhood is a stage that is culturally and ideologically bound to a
specific physiological state, this idea is conflated with contemporary notions of what childhood
means as a period of youth and innocence. However, because *Peter Pan* as a work evokes
Victorian childhood, the signifiers, the jokes, and the little references do not carry the same
weight they once did. This conflation is problematic, or at the very least misleading because
while the theme allows people to connect to *Peter Pan* on a psychological and even emotional
level, the audience that was moved to sincerely clap to save Tinkerbell no longer exists. The
theme remains, but the sense of camaraderie and shared cultural memory of childhood is lost,
which is why Peter does not command the same sort of attention and cannot garner the sense of
communitas he once did. This point is further emphasized by the fact that neither the animated
*Peter Pan* nor Hogan’s *Peter Pan* attempts to recreate that scene exactly (Hogan uses on-screen
“children of the world” while the Disney film avoids that particular call of faith altogether).

These aforementioned meanings have been obscured over time and are now gone from
our contemporary understanding of Peter and Alice. Alice is not transgressive, but rather she is
curious. Peter is not emblematic of a shared dream of childhood, but rather he is a simple boyish
character among a host of characters. With the loss of the context that made those stories speak
to audiences, contemporary adaptations need to do more than include inventive visuals or
duplicate the narrative in order to be successful in the current cultural climate.

*Visualizing Adaptations, Reimagining Stories, and Disney’s Long Arm*

My next site of investigation is the extension of the visuals within the cultural index
index by Disney animation as well as the role of Disney animation in shifting audience
expectations for Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan adaptations. To do so, I will examine the narrative and visual development of both Disney animated films along with Tim Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and P.J. Hogan’s *Peter Pan* (2003). My preliminary analysis of these four adaptations is based on the premise that Peter and Alice could not be successfully translated from book to film (or in Peter’s case, play to film) by simply changing Carroll and Barrie’s dialogue into script and prose into animation or action. There are three reasons for this. The first explanation was covered in the previous section, but is worth repeating here: Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan as stories may be unchanged, but they are understood differently than they were on their initial release due to the increasing length of time since and subsequent removal from their cultural context. In other words, as the Victorian and Edwardian eras become more impenetrable over time, much of the eras’ and therefore the stories’ common sense logic (for things as basic and conversely vital as manners, proper dialogue, and narrative expectations) is received as old-fashioned at best and incomprehensible at worst.

The second and third reasons are interrelated: These stories do not align with contemporary norms and expectations of narrative in film (such as character development and the trajectory of rising action, conflict, climax, denouement, and resolution) and therefore, in order to make up the perceived “lack,” adaptations for both texts need to engage with visual spectacle or tell narratives that more closely follow contemporary conventions. However, given that a film’s initial start-up cost (particularly for films heavy on visuals) is prohibitively expensive and necessitates the inclusion of producers, investors, and governing executive boards that administer via consensus in order to measure, project, and dictate profitability and returns on investment, the cultural product must now not only speak to audiences, but it must also be
designed to be successful. The selling point therefore becomes, by necessity, memorable sequences and settings.

This turn to economics can be better understood through Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle. As Debord argues, “The spectacle, grasped in its totality, is both the result and the project of the existing mode of production. It is not a supplement to the real world, an additional decoration” (118). Here Debord refers to the post-industrial development of capitalist production, one in which images and appearances are signifying ends, rather than accessories or mere embellishments.

Building on Marx’s concerns about capitalist production obfuscating the realities of labor, Debord’s spectacle is concerned with how ideological images are simultaneously the driving force and desired outcome of post-industrial production while providing a worldview that it justifies through its existence: “In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life. It is the omnipresent affirmation of the choice already made in production and its corollary consumption” (118). To simplify, Debord’s spectacle explains why mass-scale cultural productions have the appearances they do, in order to become mass-scale cultural productions. They exist with the goal of profitability in mind.

However, if the driving force of Debord’s spectacle is capitalist production, it helps to explain why Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan adaptations are so different from the material they were adapted from, and why these adaptations had so many visual and narrative changes. These adaptations were (and continue to be) created with profit margins in mind, rather than a concern for “authentic” or “sincere” transmission. To return to our adaptations then, Debord’s spectacle helps to explain why most people can cite the theme of the films—the desire to never
grow up in Peter’s case or the pleasures of nonsense and whimsicality in Alice’s—despite the fact that most of the particulars of the films themselves are rather fuzzy, with the exception of a few visually stunning sequences. Before going into detail about the images that have been incorporated into our cultural expectations of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, I would like to briefly discuss the general plot of the Disney animated films in order to discuss them in relation to contemporary narrative expectations, to further underscore the financially necessary importance of either changing the narrative or emphasizing visual effects.

Peter Pan, the animated Disney film released in 1953, featured a young girl named Wendy Darling who meets a strange boy named Peter on her last night in the nursery. Peter, who is against growing up on principle, invites Wendy to Neverland to tell stories and be mother to the Lost Boys. To that end, he teaches the Darling children to fly using pixie dust and happy thoughts. Peter then leads Wendy and her brothers to Neverland where the Darlings meet the Lost Boys and go on adventures involving pirates and Indians. After defeating Captain Hook, Peter’s nemesis, Peter takes the children back home to their nursery on a flying ship. Although there are a number of thrilling moments in the film, contrary to contemporary narrative expectations of character development and consequence, the adventure has no lasting effect on any single individual. Despite several significant and potentially lethal developments (the kidnapping of Tiger Lily, the destruction of the Lost Boys’ hideout and the Lost Boys commandeering the pirates’ ship), every character is in the same position that he or she was at the beginning of the film.

Alice is similarly guilty of being a story that ends how it begins. Disney’s Alice in Wonderland (1951) begins with Alice, a young girl, who is engaged in an outdoors history lesson with her sister. Instead of paying attention, Alice plays with her kitten and daydreams. Upon
sighting a rabbit in a waistcoat, Alice chases it into a rabbit hole and falls down a long tunnel filled with furniture. She meets eccentric characters (plants, animals, and humanoids) with strange ideas who recite odd stories and ask her questions. She gets threatened by the Queen of Hearts and is taken to court. The trial ends in a chase sequence involving a horde of Wonderland residents. As the chase mounts in tension, Alice realizes that she’s dreaming and wakes up to go home for tea with her sister. Once again, there is no change in narrative development or character. Alice after her adventures is every bit as contrary, whimsical, and absent-minded as she was before them. Every character she’d met on her journey was a figment of her subconscious, and so those characters cannot develop. And even were we to consider the development from within Alice’s dream, each character, as he or she is introduced, remains consistent to his or her first impression.

While I am not suggesting that we apply contemporary narrative conventions to judge the adequacy of these stories as adaptations, Peter and Alice’s nonconformity to contemporary expectations of storytelling points to the shift in their cultural value. Peter and Alice are not remembered or valued for their songs (with perhaps, the notable exception of “The Unbirthday Song” in Alice in Wonderland or “You Can Fly” in Peter Pan), nor are they remembered for their plots, which when faithfully replicated and measured by contemporary metrics of narrative are considered weak. However, both Peter and Alice have distinct and memorable visual sequences.

The emphasis on visual spectacle creates an interesting issue in that for most contemporary audiences, the Disney versions of these stories are the definitive originals by which all subsequent adaptations are compared. Bonner and Jacobs co-wrote a fascinating paper on this subject discussing the “phenomenon of the first encounter,” which describes how a
person’s understanding and reception of an adapted text is influenced by the first text he or she encountered (whether original or adaptation); this paper then uses this first encounter theory as a lens to examine Alice in Wonderland adaptations (38). Therefore, regardless of the order in which texts are published, audience members’ expectations are shaped by the memories of their first encounter with a particular text.

Given the widespread and continuous dissemination of Disney films (particularly as they are released and re-released from the Disney vault), for most people in the past few generations, audiences and film producers alike, the definitive Alice and Peter films are the Disney animated films from the 1950s. This has two overlapping effects when considered in conjunction with Debord’s spectacle: the standardization of expectations for these texts and the exaggeration of visual effect over referentiality. Once Disney versions are cemented as the definitive adaptations, Debord’s spectacle necessitates the creation of later adaptations that visually reference the Disney predecessor in order to be recognized as a “true” adaptation. Additionally, as the influence of Debord’s spectacle already imposed a focus on the visuals of these narratives over all else, later adaptations must build upon visual conventions, rather than focus overmuch on narrative. Thus the massive cultural impact of these two films adds to our general expectations for future adaptations of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan. And in doing so, Disney films expand the cultural indices through visual markers for both stories.

We can see examples of this Disney influence through the inclusion of two memorable additions: Peter’s rambunctious shadow and Alice’s reorientation upon her landing in Wonderland. In both cases, the sparse description in the “original” literary text is changed and developed in the animated adaptation, to make a memorable and visually arresting sequence. Peter’s shadow first appears in Barrie’s text as something that is simultaneously “quite the
ordinary kind [of shadow]” but also “so like washing” that it could not be hung out on the window, for fear that it would “[lower] the whole tone of the house” (26-27). In every respect, including Wendy’s successful attempt to sew it onto Peter, the shadow behaves like an article of clothing; so much so, in fact, that Wendy regrets not having ironed it before it was reattached. Given that Peter Pan was initially a play, this use of a fabric-like shadow is an interesting and imaginative concept that would be simple enough to perform live while still being playful and creative. However, with the advent of animation technology, Peter’s shadow would take on a life of its own in a way that would have been very difficult to capture on stage.

In the Disney animated film (and subsequently, the Hogan adaptation), Peter’s shadow mirrors and reflects its owner’s impulses, if not his form. It flies, it sneaks, it has a puckish spirit and isn’t above attacking Peter to get away from him. In both versions, Disney and Hogan, the shadow flees from the drawer the instant it is open and has to be battled into submission. And, precisely because both Peter and his shadow can fly, the entire room becomes an arena in which the two can tussle, which makes for arresting and inventive choreography.

It is not just the idea of a puckish shadow that got transmitted to Hogan’s adaptation—in fact, much of the Hogan nursery scene is an adaptation of the Disney film, rather than Barrie’s book. From Peter and Tinkerbell’s flashy entrance into the nursery and the drawer scenes with Tinkerbell, to the inclusion of a keyhole through which Tinkerbell can spy, all of these are examples of slick, compelling, original scenes from the Disney animation. And in Hogan’s interpretation of Peter Pan, even the idea of how the shadow is reattached mirrors the Disney version. As the shadow has been established as a sentient figure with a mind of its own, after Peter grabs ahold of it and Wendy sews it onto Peter by the feet, it is not yet fully tame, despite the physical connection. Both Peters reassert their dominance over their shadows in the same
way: by “kicking” their legs up towards a wall, thereby slamming their shadows into place. After this, of course, both Peters move erratically while staring at their shadows to ensure that the shadows now behave as they should.

However, not all variations are created equal, nor are they replicated faithfully. When comparing Burton to Disney, there is more variation in the Alice sequence in which Alice falls down the rabbit hole; the animated version has Alice casually drifting downwards whereas Burton’s Alice is hurtling towards the ground at breakneck speed. However, the requisite inclusion of the random pieces of furniture that line the walls of the tunnel and follow their own laws of inertia is in keeping with the Carrollian originals (Carroll 12-14). The difference between the animated film version and Burton’s film is not that surprising, given that Burton felt that among Alice adaptations, “there was no one definitive version” (Rohter). And indeed, there are fewer similarities between these two Alice adaptations than there are between Hogan’s and Disney’s Peter Pan. However, despite Burton’s implied claim to definitive vision and innovation, there is a similar turn at the end of both fall scenes that exists only in the adaptations.

The specific departure from the original tale comes in how Alice lands after her extremely long descent down the rabbit hole. The description from Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is as follows: “[W]hen suddenly, thump! thump! down she came upon a heap of sticks and dry leaves, and the fall was over” (Carroll 14). However, in the animated film, when Alice lands, the world appears to shake and then Alice is shown upside-down with her hair falling loose towards the floor. The next shot is from her perspective, with the white rabbit racing down a topsy-turvy corridor on what appears to be the ceiling. The image jumps back to Alice, who is shown with her feet caught on a curtain rod. She rights herself and runs after him.
In Burton’s adaptation, Alice falls through what was, on her descent, the floor. She rolls on impact, and lies flat on the ground. However, when Alice pushes herself back up to a sitting position, the camera switches to a shaking upside-down candelabra connected to the floor by a taut chain with its flames dangling downwards. When the camera returns to Alice, we see her as she sits by the candelabra, with her hair hanging upwards. The camera turns counter clockwise, righting itself, and in so doing, mimics the correction of the gravitational shift. After a brief, thrilling moment of Alice sitting on what is now apparently the ceiling, she falls once again, but this time onto the floor.

In both sets of adaptations for Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, what were only incidental moments in the initial publications are more thoroughly developed. In some cases, such as the upside-down world effect or the trickster shadow, the development was pure invention, while in others, such as the shadow-sewing or the furniture-lined walls, the scenes built on the source material. However, all of these changes gesture towards the surreality of these narratives through the use of added visual complexity to these particular scenes.

Not only do these visually arresting additions further develop the sense of oddity or childlike wonderment, but they also encourage intent, close viewing just to ascertain what is happening on screen. As Burton’s Alice plummets to greater and greater depths, the speed encourages viewers to look even closer at the items as they hurtle by. And in certain cases, some of the action goes by so quickly that it is difficult to follow. For instance, animated Peter’s shadow trips, not on a chair, but on the shadow of a chair, which enables his capture. In all four films, there is pleasure inherent in the mad, fast-paced action and camera tricks. These heavily image-based additions also suggest, however, that contemporary interpretations of Peter and
Alice rely on visual references from both the literary and animated “sources” to cultivate a sense of familiarity.

Now if we return to the issue of fidelity in adaptations with an emphasis on our contemporary understanding of narrative, we must consider the issue that arises in demanding fidelity to what will be understood as the weak narrative that is built into the heart of both Disney animated films. When this phenomenon is put in conjunction with the prominence of the Disney films as adaptations and Ur-texts, subsequent adaptations and interpretations of Peter and Alice must navigate a fine balance between visual and narrative reference to the Disney adaptations (acknowledging its influence) and bolstering the story through some device, whether through the inclusion of stunning visual effects or plot additions (thereby “fixing” their narrative weakness).

To move too far in either direction—to change too much, or to be too true—is to render the adaptation either unfamiliar (and therefore unacceptable as it removes the pleasure of recognition) or unsatisfying for contemporary audiences with contemporary narrative expectations. Adaptation theorist Linda Hutcheon argues that there is something inherently pleasurable about adaptations as adaptations. She writes, “Part of this pleasure, I want to argue, comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and rememberance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change” (4). The adaptation must resolve the tension between two conflicting impulses to maintain or to innovate. In either case, a visuals-heavy adaptation that strays too far down one path (fidelity or novelty) would be unprofitable and therefore improbable in this age of the modern spectacle. However, Debord’s spectacle demands profitable originality, which often results in an odd tension in contemporary adaptations that are simultaneously more and less familiar in that they are expected to take on unexpected, bizarre
new twists and constantly developing a visual checklist of expectation, while also replicating and relying on the familiarity of other long-established tropes.

_Alices, Peters, and the Imperial Now_

Contemporary Wonderland and Neverland interpretations must navigate the complicated process of adapting a text that, in our contemporary understanding, is expected to be somewhat incomprehensible, by staying true to some of the odd conventions (washed clean of their original Victorian narrative signification, such as the pinafore-turned-apron from Chapter One) while also introducing new oddities in order to evoke the same feelings of giddy excitement that an earlier Peter or Alice interpretation would (such as Peter’s playful shadow). However, the process is ongoing as additions that were once considered novel and new when they were developed become increasingly more familiar and expected, which extends, even further, the desire for new strangeness.

This explains how Alice and Peter both develop over time. Alice can begin as a seven-and-a-half-year-old Victorian girl in Carroll’s story who grows into a nine-year-old Victorian girl in the animated Disney film, who develops into a nineteen-year-old Victorian woman in Burton’s Hollywood movie while also becoming a young American female judo instructor in Willing’s SyFy original miniseries. With each successive adaptation, Alice steps further and further away from her seven-year-old Victorian self. Peter follows a similarly convoluted path where he begins as a one-day-old British bird child in Barrie’s book, who then becomes a Disney-animated twelve-year-old American fairy boy, an adolescent American jungle boy in Hogan’s Hollywood feature, and finally, Willing’s clever adolescent British pickpocket in Victorian England.

The continuous evolution and navigation of familiar novelty and bizarre expectation influences not only the protagonists, but also the settings and secondary characters. Perhaps the
clearest example of this phenomenon is that of Neverland. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Barrie’s Neverland was an uncharted island in the sea. Disney’s animated film projected that island into outer space by amending Barrie’s “second on the right,” to the now iconic “second star on the right.” Hogan’s Neverland was in keeping with Disney’s directive and his Peter Pan warped the children through hyperspace before reaching the island. Willing’s Neverland, on the other hand, is not only in space, it is also located in the exact position in the universe where all time stands still. According to the Neverland original character Dr. Fludd, Neverland is the small planet where the four corners of the universe collapse in on themselves, thereby stopping time (which, in turn, explains why Neverland residents never age in Willing’s universe). Neverland is therefore always an island, but as time goes on, the how of the island continues to shift.

Another prime example of this familiar and strange dichotomy is the Hatter. The Mad Hatter from Tenniel’s iconic illustrations is often portrayed wearing an oversized top hat, sporting enormous buckteeth and unruly hair. He is short and rude and does not fall under contemporary conventions of attractiveness. Disney’s animated Hatter is similar to Tenniel’s Hatter in those respects, as he is also short, with messy white hair, buckteeth, and an oversized bowtie in addition to his top hat. However, as we approach recent decades, the Hatter has somehow become an attractive gentleman.

Burton’s Hatter, who is played by Johnny Depp, is tall, brooding, and signifies his madness through the color of his burnt-orange hair, mismatched garments, brief periods of rage, and constant accent switching. Although he and Alice never define their relationship, there are moments of sexual tension that remain unaddressed in the film beyond a few hints in the dialogue and longing glances. He does, however, keep the top hat, although his has a wide, pink silk scarf for a hatband. Willing’s Hatter, on the other hand, is not mad so much as he is manic.
Played by Andrew-Lee Potts, this Hatter speeds through his dialogue in a continuous, rambling fashion that is often punctuated by sarcasm, strange facial expressions, and the occasional sleight of hand. Clothed in raggedy second-hand chic fashion, Potts’s Hatter wears an understated top hat, but his nervous energy is similar to Depp’s. However, rather than simply hinting at desire, Willing’s Alice ends with a heated kiss between Alice and the Hatter.

Although this comparative look at the similarities and differences between adaptations may be interesting to Alice and Peter aficionados, rather than running down an exhaustive list of minutiae, the more compelling matter at hand is the question of why, when these adaptations are so vastly different from their original source material, we continue to adapt Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan. As the first section concluded, in our contemporary moment and subsequent loss of communitas and carnivalesque understanding, we do not relate to or even comprehend those two stories as they were first written (the annotated editions of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan abound with such explanatory notes to facilitate a contemporary reader’s ease of understanding and compensate for the lack of context). In fact, the box office failure of Hogan’s Peter Pan can be seen as a reflection of how little a contemporary audience cares about fidelity.

However, as per the preceding section on animation and spectacle, the adaptive medium shift into film necessitated both visual spectacle and a profitability that was reliant on familiar tropes in conjunction with fresh twists. The unspoken question, then, is why studios continue to adapt Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan for mass appeal when every adaptation has to perform an intricate balancing act between including an ever-growing cultural index of expectations for Alice and Peter[12] while also fulfilling the desire for ever increasing heights of visual spectacle and novelty.
Although it is tempting and reasonable to claim that Peter and Alice, because of their similarly familiar and weak narratives, offer up a Gordian knot of a challenge that is continually taken up by intrepid adaptors, it still does not explain a continued interest in recreating what would be considered in our current moment a fundamentally broken narrative with minimal character development. Often the solution for contemporary adaptations is to deviate completely from the initial narrative while maintaining certain conventions and iconography. Burton’s answer to the narrative question is to graft a version of the Hero’s Journey onto the Alice story of a girl exploring a strange space. Hogan, however, keeps most of the original story, but develops, a little more explicitly, the tragic implications of a childhood love story that can never be fulfilled by pushing Peter into facing post-adolescent love. Willing’s response is to change genres altogether, in *Neverland* and *Alice*, by including elements of science fiction (the door to Neverland is a teleporting orb, while Alice literally walks through a looking glass into a dystopian world).

These changes do raise the question, however, of why people continue to take on the challenge of adapting Alice and Peter. It would be simpler and perhaps less risky to tackle an altogether original story or an adaptation of a more recent text. Digging into the annals of children’s literature seems counterintuitive precisely because of our contemporary lack of context. Given all of these challenges and the emphasis in these adaptations on visual spectacle, I argue that the continued production of these adaptations is the result of an interest in the period these stories evoke, which brings us back full circle to the source texts and their imperialist ideology.

One of the most obvious ways in which this Victorian interest is expressed is through, again, visuals. However, the interest in the period and setting of Victorian England should not be
conflated with a superficial interest in strictly fashion. Of course, given that one of 2010 Alice in Wonderland’s Academy Awards is in Costume Design, appearance is certainly part of the allure of the title. However, as Sven Lütticken argues in his critique of Debord, this is not a simple matter of “clothing history in Roman dress” and taking on the visual signifiers of a time period. Lütticken, in “From One Spectacle to Another” considers the evocative pleasure of the Roman Empire as a popular period in history that was repeatedly represented in various texts and through various media, particularly in “the colonial Empires of nineteenth-century capitalism, but also of Cold-War United States and of contemporary capitalism […] as the global post-national Empire” (66). Lütticken argues that this interest, far from being one of simple spectacle, is actually a logical cultural manifestation born of parallel interests in empire during different stages of history.

Building upon Walter Benjamin’s concept of now-time (which considers the ways in which the past is appropriated and drenched in a new meaning that speaks to the contemporary moment), Lütticken coins the term Imperial now-time to refer to “an uneasy yet pleasurably complicit identification with Imperial Rome and its hubris” (67). Lütticken’s argument, though involved, is worth quoting at length here:

Imperial now-time is the product of the complicity between Benjamin’s two enemies: the répétition du mythe of neocyclical time on the one hand and the capitalist-bourgeois mythologization of history in the form of the ideology of progress on the other. Both conspire to create a regime of fashions and delirious innovations plotted repetitively on the axis of progress, a pseudo-cyclical economy […] in which change itself has a static quality. This is the doom-laden now-time of empire, hoping that its dynamics safeguard it against repeating
Rome’s fall yet always returning to Rome—both to question and to reassure itself (67).

In simpler terms, Benjamin’s neocyclical time refers to the ways in which, under advanced capitalism, there is a seeming return to a mythical, simpler past that breaks time down into periods of work and rest. This “return” is not simple illusion, but rather a literal product of the conditions of advanced capitalism, which nevertheless gives off the impression of returning to a mythical past. Neocyclical time, in conjunction with the interpretation of history as a continuum of progress, renders certain periods (in Lütticken’s case, specifically, the Roman Empire) seductive and evocative for other periods of ideological similarity. Interest in these periods and their ideologies is expressed as interest in the visual tropes of that period as well, which Lutticken describes as a result of both fear and desire,

In […] subsequent empires, a different Rome returned both as wish-image and nightmare, as the dominant states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries recognized themselves variously in the heyday or the decadence of the Roman Empire—the former always being in danger of morphing into the latter.”

While Lütticken’s argument is centered on the Roman Empire, it can easily be applied to the Victorian era, especially when considering the long-standing American fascination with the period. In fact, Lütücke argues that the 1950s was “a return to the heydays of imperial now-time” in America precisely because it was a moment in history when the United States had taken on an imperial role (68). Interestingly, this aligns precisely with the 1950s release of both of Disney’s animated film adaptations. This suggests that Lütteke’s argument can indeed be extended to include Victorianism as visual and cultural shorthand for imperialism for Americans in the 1950s.
This cyclical, continued interest in a simultaneously grand-but-doomed moment in history cultivates what Lütticken calls a “morbid fascination with a visual culture that [is] both alien and familiar” (67). Similarly, in contemporary America, there is an increasing interest in the fashions, texts, images, artwork, architecture, and general life of the Victorian period as evidenced in the steampunk craze, Gothic Lolita fashion trends, Sherlock Holmes’s return to popularity, the proliferation of Victorian-era adaptations, and of course, a pronounced increase of interest in Peter and Alice. This most recent upswing of interest in the Victorian era could be due to concerns about the gradual political and economic decline of American influence abroad in the past decade. In some respects, the idea of the British Empire offers a tantalizing picture of staid progress, with clear delineations of class, race, and gender in “civilized” society. Everything and everyone had a role and a place. In the era before the civil rights movement, the general understanding was that there were no complicated identity politics; rather there was a blithe acceptance of Great Britain’s role in disseminating civilization outwards to backwards spaces.

Although these simple pleasures are never explicitly stated, there is an extent to which both Peter and Alice allow the depoliticization of the Victorian era as an ahistorical, aesthetically and stylistically distinct, evocative time. Although Peter’s narrative does not spend much time in Victorian England, the whole act of running Neverland can be considered imperialistic, as Peter’s only rival and equal in Neverland is Captain James Hook, who, despite his unruly band of pirates, is a graduate from the distinguished Eton School. The native Pickaninnies are simply residents who, despite having a greater stake in the politics of the island, are left as passive bystanders. This use of the term “Pickaninny” is also a fascinating case of Othering insofar as Barrie uses it as a tribal name for the indigenous natives of Neverland, while in its more popular usage, it is a derogatory term that describes racist caricatures of African-American children.
However, under the guise of fantastical, adventurous play, many of these notes can be elided. For Wonderland, as an extension of Victorian England, there is simultaneously more and less of an imperialist bent insofar as the social structure of Wonderland aligns with Victorian high society (and in response to Victorian high society), while it is undeniable that the nobility are all humans while the subjects are speaking animals. It is worth noting that Alice, as a young British girl, is accepted and integrated into the high court with ease, despite her status as an unfamiliar stranger to Wonderland. In fact, her second trip through the looking glass ends with her coronation.

And although the previous paragraph refers specifically to Carroll and Barrie’s books, much of the imperialist impulse has carried over into the adaptations. Burton’s Alice, after her return to England, decides to do her part in expanding England’s foothold in China via her father’s shipping company. Willing’s Alice undoes the system of governance in Wonderland and replaces the former monarch with one more to her liking. Then, without having to deal with any of the consequences of the rebellion, she leaves Wonderland and returns home.

Hogan’s Peter, on the other hand, as a response to the explicit imperialist impulse in Barrie’s text, ignores the unnamed native people as much as possible. The natives of Neverland never speak and Tiger Lily, the only native with a given name, conveys her thoughts through hand signals and expressions. Willing’s Neverland is not much better. Although the “Kaw” natives are portrayed as human beings with a particular way of life, there are expressions of mystification and nature-worship (for example, fairies are called tree spirits), as well as an obvious and stereotypical naïveté (which trucks with conventions associated with the noble savage) that gets repeatedly exploited by their British guests, the pick-pocking team of Lost Boys from Victorian England. Although this is not a case of direct imperialist urges of
domination, there is an implicit suggestion that the native way of life is, despite its inherent nobility, lacking and backwards, which again reflects an imperialist perspective.

Through the development of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland adaptations, we can see how cultural manifestations are recontextualized and appropriated to mean simultaneously more and less than the sum of their parts. The shift from binding texts that unify their audiences, to visual spectacles to awe their audiences, and then finally to strangely familiar yet starkly new stories to delight new generations with seemingly innocent adventure, is one of ever-shifting contexts and ideological significance. However, there is one aspect of both Alice and Peter that remains to be discussed—the final piece of the puzzle of Peter and Alice’s allure—the stories behind the stories, of authors Barrie and Carroll, and their child muses, the fictionalization of which will be discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER III:
IMAGINED SPARKS AND HISTORICAL DREAMCHILDREN:
AUTHORS, CHILD MUSES, AND THE STORIES THEY INSPIRED

After the lukewarm reception of P. J. Hogan’s *Peter Pan* (2003) discussed in the beginning of the previous chapter, another Peter Pan title in the following year would seem like a risky investment. After all, the 2003 film only just barely earned back its $100 million production budget through overseas ticket sales (Box Office Mojo) and was generally ignored by critics. Yet, a second Peter Pan film in 2004 did remarkably well. With only a quarter of the Hogan film’s exorbitant budget, it earned $116 million (Box Office Mojo) and won eighteen awards—one of which was an Oscar (IMDb). The catch is that the 2004 film wasn’t really about Peter Pan; it was about J. M. Barrie, the author. This critically acclaimed box-office success was Marc Forster’s *Finding Neverland* (2004). Peter Pan’s fictionalized origin story outsold a faithful adaptation of the original Peter Pan narrative.

Of course, there are other important mitigating factors. As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Peter Pan* (2003) had stiff competition in the *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King* (2003) during its big-screen run. Its celebrity appeal hinged solely on Jason Isaacs in the joint-role of Mr. Darling and Capt. Hook, while the rest of the film was filled out with an international cast of relative unknowns and untested child actors. Meanwhile, *Finding Neverland* (2004) had no real competitors in and out of its genre during its release. It had ample star power with Johnny Depp, Kate Winslet, and Dustin Hoffman in major roles. There is also a cultural bias that rates the artistic merit of certain genres over others; dramatic retellings of histories are more likely to win critical acclaim as opposed to family-friendly genres aimed at young audiences. Despite these caveats and addendums, the success of *Finding Neverland* (2004) in the face of *Peter Pan’s* (2003) failure begs the question: Why would the origin story of a children’s book outsell a
version of the story itself? And considering the project of this thesis, a corollary to that question would be: What does this phenomenon have to do with Peter Pan or Alice in Wonderland?

First, it should be noted that while the origin story classification is far from rare, from the standpoint of the Peter and Alice cultural indices, there are relatively few texts that fall under this category when compared to the innumerable adaptations that both Peter and Alice stories have inspired. For this chapter, my focus is on the most recent examples for each story: the film *Finding Neverland* (2004) for Peter Pan and the novel *Alice I Have Been* (2009) for Alice in Wonderland. As mentioned above, *Finding Neverland* is an award-winning film that tells the story of J. M. Barrie, a playwright trapped in a marriage gone cold, who finds new inspiration in an unexpected friendship with a family of boys and their recently widowed mother, which culminates in the creation of *Peter Pan*, the play that would make his career.

*Alice I Have Been* (2009), a novel by Melanie Benjamin, tells the story not only of how *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* came to be, but also its aftereffects on the girl-child who inspired it. The novel is broken up into three major parts, all narrated by Alice: the first is from the perspective of young Alice as she ages from seven to ten, who develops an inappropriate childhood crush on a stuttering math instructor who acts as a playmate for her and her siblings; the second portion covers Alice’s life as a young woman with a scandal-ridden past, trying to leave behind her association with Dodgson and Wonderland behind amidst intimations of a terrible, reputation-sullying past incident involving the two of them; and finally, the novel ends with Alice as a much older married woman and mother of three, looking back on her life. To round out my discussion of origin stories, I will also reference the novel *Still She Haunts Me* (2001; featuring Alice), the film *Dreamchild* (1985; featuring Alice), and the BBC miniseries *Lost Boys* (1978; featuring Peter).
These origin stories told through films and novels all capitalize on their connection to Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland by incorporating popular, common, and current elements from Peter and Alice’s cultural indices. This includes quotes from the stories as they are being inspired or drafted, cameo appearances from iconic characters (such as the Mad Hatter or Captain Hook), or even the replication of entire scenes from the Peter play or Alice novels (either framed as performances within the story or as manifestations of the authors’ imaginations).

This connection to *Peter Pan* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is integral insofar as the enduring appeal of Barrie and Dodgson’s children’s classics spearheads the interest in the stories’ histories. Had a contemporary audience been interested in the authors alone, this chapter would be about biographical fictions. Had that interest been in their completed works, this chapter would be about adaptations of Dodgson’s later book, *Sylvie and Bruno*, or the numerous plays that Barrie was famous for in his day. Instead, we have period pieces that are not only concerned with referencing Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, but also in the authors, the children who inspired them, and the circumstances that brought these stories into the world. Despite the inclusion of adaptive elements, cues from biographical fictions, and hints of historical period dramas, our interest and therefore our first and foremost allegiance is to Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan.

It’s important to keep sight of this point because the representation of these authors’ stories has an implicit contradiction that runs counter to the initial impulse to seek them out. Set in the Victorian or Edwardian era, these stories feature a lonely author who befriends a child (and his or her set of young siblings) and writes a classic children’s story based on that relationship. As this sparse summary suggests, the stories about the creation of *Peter Pan* or
Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland are concerned with the improbable friendship and muse-author relationship that inspired these classic narratives. However, the unlikeliness of such a relationship between a child and an adult with no previous social connection brings into question the adult’s intentions. By examining how these aspersions are dealt with in current fictionalized retellings of these Alice and Peter origin stories, we can get a more nuanced understanding of the lengths to which these texts must go in order to positively portray a man who befriends an unrelated child in a manner that seems both natural and appropriate.

It is worth noting that my analysis of these historical fictions is predicated on their identification as 21st century narratives with a specifically North American perspective. This designation excludes Dreamchild and The Lost Boys, both of which were made by and for a specifically British audience. However, both Alice novels (Alice I Have Been and Still She Haunts Me) have American authors. The film Finding Neverland has an American screenwriter, and the film was based on a play written by an American playwright. The textual analysis for this chapter therefore takes into account a particularly North American hyperawareness and dread of, as well as obsession with, the threat to children by adult male pedophilic impulses.

As Elise Chenier argues in her essay “The Natural Order of Disorder: Pedophilia, Stranger Danger and the Normalising Family,” the United States is one of the countries most invested in the construction of the “dangerous stranger” as an outward manifestation of the American institutionalization of child protection from external forces (180). In fact, according to Chenier, the very notion of the sexual predation endangering children is such a contentious issue that (and again, Chenier singles out the US) American researchers and treatment practitioners could endanger their credibility and livelihoods by offering alternative perspectives that do not align with the mainstream narrative of pedophilic tendencies manifesting strictly in “stranger
danger” (173). She also argues that American approaches to sex crime have “extended to all English-speaking nations and nations culturally influenced by the United States since the 1990s” (Chenier 180). This hyperawareness and fear of the sexual threat to children play large roles in how Barrie and Dodgson are represented in *Alice I Have Been* and *Finding Neverland.* Additionally, those dates are significant insofar as the in-depth analysis for this chapter is limited to works published into the aughts.

My argument for this chapter extends Jean Baudrillard’s considerations about simulation with regard to childishness in certain spaces in order to argue that in our contemporary moment permissible childishness is no longer tied to a socially sanctioned location such as Disneyland, but rather, it has become a particular mode of thought that is closely associated with the creative impulse. I use Michel Foucault’s argument regarding expressive silence to further explore how, in the case of Barrie and Dodgson, every moment is carefully constructed and contextualized to address and deny the potential threat of child abuse. However, it takes Judith Butler’s understanding of gender construction and heteronormativity to explain how the authors’ potential threat is conclusively negated or otherwise dealt with. Ultimately, this chapter is an investigation into how contemporary origin stories for Peter and Alice resolve an inherent paradoxical interest. While these fictional stories must positively portray Barrie and Dodgson, their histories implicitly suggest unsavory behavior, and yet that positive portrayal must be maintained in order to assert the innocence of *Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan,* and the accompanying network of positive associations within their cultural indices.

*Two Brief Histories and the Introduction of a Problem*

My investigation begins with a brief overview of the histories behind these stories and the contradictory dilemma they present to these based-on-a-true-story fictions about *Peter Pan* and
Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. To lay some basic groundwork, I have included a brief collection of facts regarding Alice’s origins from Martin Gardner’s notes and annotations from The Annotated Alice.

Alice Liddell was the daughter of Henry George Liddell, the dean of Christ Church, at Oxford (xviii). In her youth, she made the acquaintance of a Christ Church math instructor by the name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (xvi, xvii). One summer day, when she was ten, Dodgson took Alice and her two sisters, Ina, age thirteen, and Edith, age eight, on a boating trip (7n1). Dodgson would later refer to this day as “the golden afternoon” (7n1). It was during this trip that Dodgson first told the curious story of a girl who fell down a rabbit hole (7n1). Alice was so enchanted by his telling that she asked him to write it down (7n1). When he finally did, he published the book under the pen name Lewis Carroll (the name that most readers now associate with the Wonderland books).

From the beginning, with Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland itself, the lines between biography and fiction are blurred. The opening poem to Dodgson’s first book refers to the golden afternoon and includes all three girls (with pseudonyms Prima, Secunda, and Tertia) in addition to the “dream-child” of Alice who “[moves] through a land / Of wonders wild and new” (7). There is no direct connection drawn in the poem between Secunda and the dream-child Alice, although the second Liddell daughter is indeed named Alice. Similarly, Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There concludes with a poem about Alice: “Still she haunts me, phantomwise, / Alice moving under skies / Never seen by waking eyes” (273). It is worth repeating Gardner’s observation that this second poem (from which the above quote is excerpted) is an acrostic of Alice Liddell’s full name: Alice Pleasance Liddell (273n1). It is,
however, also worth noting that it is unclear whether the poem refers to the character Alice or the girl.

As suggested by the acrostic, and according to Dodgson’s own letters, his relationship to Alice was “quite a different thing” than those he had with his many “child-friends” (Selected Letters 140), but it was not to last; at one point, for reasons unknown today, Alice’s mother burnt all of Dodgson’s early letters to Alice and took measures to keep them apart (Carroll xix). Alice eventually grew up and married, becoming Alice Pleasance Hargreaves née Liddell. Correspondence between the two after her marriage was cordial, infrequent, and brief (Selected Letters 140, 141, 143). Although none of these tidbits are especially salacious, Carroll scholars have debated over the relationship between Alice and Dodgson for decades. However, scholars are not the only people interested in Alice’s biography. Over the years, Alice Liddell has become a popular name for the Alice in Wonderland character for adaptations, spin-off stories, videogames, films, and comic books. In most of these cases, only her name is borrowed, rather than the particulars of Alice Hargreaves’s actual history (as in the videogame American McGee’s Alice, who shares Alice Hargreaves’s dark brown hair in addition to her name, but little else).

Peter Llewelyn Davies’s story is somewhat similar, although not as well known. For the particulars of his tale, I turn to Maria Tatar’s notes and annotations from the centennial edition of The Annotated Peter Pan. An acclaimed playwright, J. M. Barrie was married in his thirties to an actress named Mary Ansell (lxxix, lxxx). Several years into his marriage, Barrie made the acquaintance of three young brothers he’d met at Kensington Gardens—George, aged five, Jack, aged three, and Peter, still a baby (lxxxiii). Their parents were Arthur Llewelyn Davies and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies née du Maurier (lxxxiii).
The Llewelyn Davies boys grew in number from three to five, as Sylvia and Arthur had five sons altogether—two after making Barrie’s acquaintance (lxxxv, xc). Barrie was uncommonly fond of the Llewelyn Davies boys, visited them often, and eventually integrated himself into their family as Uncle Jimmy (xcv, lxxxix). He found them inspirational and recycled some of their playtime plots into his work (215). After some time, Barrie began writing a book based on his relationship with the boys (lxxxiv). This book, called *The Little White Bird*, marks the first published appearance of Peter Pan as a character in a short story. Barrie dedicated *Peter Pan* to “the Five” while admitting that he’d “made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. That is all [Peter Pan] is, the spark I got from you” (215).

The Barrie and Llewelyn Davies’ story ends in tragedy, however. Arthur died of cancer in 1907, Barrie’s wife divorced him in 1909, and only a few short years after Arthur’s death, Sylvia died of cancer in 1910 (xcviii, xcvi, xcvii). Under some suspicious circumstances regarding one creatively manipulated name in Sylvia’s will (which Barrie had copied by hand from Sylvia’s handwritten original), the Llewelyn Davies boys became, as in Barrie’s prophetic earlier dedication from *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, “my boys” (lxxxiv, xcviii, c).

Now, although these are interesting histories of how two writers met a charming group of siblings who inspired their classic children’s stories, they still do not explain why they merit inclusion in a thesis about the persistence of Alice and Peter in our contemporary cultural moment, considering that relevant texts are few and far between. Despite their meager real estate in the larger cultural indices of Peter and Alice, adaptations of Peter Llewelyn Davies and Alice Hargreaves’s stories are significant in their impact; once known, knowledge of these origin
stories colors every subsequent interpretation and reading of both stories. This makes the positive portrayal of these figures in popular culture all the more important.

To be more specific, the potential for pedophilic interest resonates from each of these stories, regardless of its historical veracity. It’s true that the biographical notes listed above are not necessarily inappropriate or salacious. It’s also possible that the affection between these men and the children they loved was entirely innocuous. However, the image of Barrie and Dodgson as childless men, developing a relationship with a child (or children) of no particular relation raises some provocative concerns. To a contemporary mindset, Charles Dodgson and J. M. Barrie already seem suspect as adult men with no blood relation, close residential proximity, professional involvement, or direct social connection beyond that of acquaintance with any of these children to explain the desire to befriend them.

Significantly more disturbing is the idea that Barrie and Dodgson had continuous, unfettered access to one or more children and that these prolonged relationships were then developed to the extent that both men were willing and able to create a narrative inspired by individual children’s personalities and playtime habits. In light of documented events such as Mrs. Liddell tearing up Dodgson’s letters to young Alice or Barrie forging his name onto Mrs. Llewelyn Davies’s will as he was transcribing it, neither relationship seems particularly normal even if one were to disregard the already-irregular relationship between a man and child of no particular relation.

This puts the fictional representation of these origin stories in an impossible situation. Considering the subject matter of children’s literature and the widespread popularity of Wonderland- and Neverland-based narratives, there is an expectation for these fictions to maintain the innocence of both these stories and their authors. However, as historical fictions,
these narratives must also present an accurate and/or realistic representation of facts and must accede to genre expectations for authenticity and realism through the presentation of imperfection and ugly truths. The one undeniable and potentially ugly truth is that both of these stories involve men who were uncommonly fond of particular children whose friendships they pursued. At the heart of these fictional origin stories lies a core dilemma that each must resolve in a satisfying manner: How does one depict a man who is deeply affectionate towards children who aren’t his while simultaneously denying that any impropriety occurred?

_Baudrillard and the Simulated Joy of Childhood_

There are complications with engaging this question in that the expectations governing both adult and child behavior overlap in the representation of creativity, which is identified by these origin stories as the common ground shared between artists and children. This connection through imagination explains why most of these narratives include scenes wherein a child inspires the author to duplicate or adapt one of their conversations into their writing. For this reason, when Alice crows “Curiouser and curiouser!” in _Alice I Have Been_ (Benjamin, ch. 4, ¶115), Alice’s outburst is doubly charming—for the literary reference but also at the idea that this iconic phrase might have come from young Alice, rather than Dodgson.

Conversely, Dodgson and Barrie’s assumed child-like nature enables them to better understand their muses. Their willingness and ability to engage with children gives them valuable insight into the children’s point of view. In _Finding Neverland_, for example, Barrie first meets Michael as a pretend-prisoner trapped under a bench by the “evil Prince George.” Barrie responds to Michael with complete seriousness and does not break the illusion of his play by mentioning that Michael’s prison was actually the space under Barrie’s bench or that Michael was free to leave. Instead he expands upon their imaginary space by asserting his identity as a
“bear” trainer and dancing for their “court” with his dog. Although the scene is charming, there is a deeper point worth investigating. This scene allows the Barrie character a degree of dignity, despite his enthusiasm for childish pursuits, by recasting his persona as a creative figure. Behavior that would be considered immature in others is represented as acceptable eccentricity rather than a threatening or inappropriate attachment to children’s games.

Both *Finding Neverland* and *Alice I Have Been* contextualize these authors’ relationship with the Liddells or the Llewelyn Davies by showing that the men were inspired to write by the company of children. In *Alice I Have Been*, Alice’s early observation of her father rushing about gets integrated in Dodgson’s first telling of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* during one of their boating trips. The reference is unmistakable and commented on by the girls. The creative absurdity of transforming the Liddell girls’ father into a scampering rabbit in a waistcoat has the girls collapsing into giggles. However, this representation of artistic fecundity and inspiration as coming from the realm of children is still problematic in that it creates a false binary between a drab adult world and an inventive world for children.

In this case, I question not the particulars of representing the creative process, but rather, the conception of imagination as inherently child-like. Helpful here are Jean Baudrillard’s thoughts on adult behavior in Disneyland as noted in his seminal essay “The Precession of Simulacra,”

This world wants to be childish in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the “real” world, and to conceal the fact that true childishness is everywhere—that it is that of the adults themselves who come [to Disneyland] to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness (461).
Baudrillard suggests that by providing a constructed space where childhood is simulated and expected in all of its visitors, adults have permission (via the implicit norms of the park setting) to behave as children without fear of social rebuke. However, the devious reality is that by designating an approved location in which such behavior is not only condoned, but also encouraged, that designation is taken-for-granted evidence for the inappropriateness of adult childishness elsewhere.

However, this constructed adult-child binary is strictly reinforced in modern North American practice. What is considered appropriate for children is largely inappropriate for adults and vice-versa. As Baudrillard proposes, the existence of Disneyland creates an artificial demand for a limited form of permissible childishness in adults. However, in a manner that Baudrillard perhaps did not anticipate during the writing of *The Precession of Simulacra*, this demand for the manufacture and dissemination of simulated but acceptable adult childishness is no longer bound to a particular space, but rather a mindset and a context. In the case of Dodgson and Barrie, the acceptable mindset is creativity, and the acceptable context is either the freedom of private consumption and leisure or the demands of creative work. This distinction between acceptable and unacceptable childishness in adults is paramount in casting the authors in a positive light.

To return to my earlier point about creativity as the common ground between artists and children, when considering representations of imaginative thinking, these origin narratives serve as metaphorical Disneylands that represent socially acceptable child-like mentalities that adult audiences may enjoy, relatively free of social guilt. This pleasure is the direct result of the ideological division between work/leisure, adulthood/childhood, and public/private life as it is replicated and maintained in the representation of reasonable adults in these stories. Childhood aligns with leisure and privacy, while adulthood is associated with work and public life.
It comes as no surprise then, that in *Alice I Have Been*, Dodgson first gains access to the privacy of the Liddell home (and therefore the Liddell children) through his amateur photography hobby. After becoming acquainted with them, he would take the girls boating in his free time, but only after obtaining consent from Mrs. Liddell. Outside of his imagined Disneyland, Dodgson is understood to have a legitimate adult profession as a math instructor that has little to do with his private relationship with the Liddell girls. Yet it is during these private outings that Dodgson becomes a creative virtuoso spinning long stories for the girls’ endless enjoyment.

Similar to Dodgson’s case, *Finding Neverland*’s Barrie is at his most inventive and imaginative when he is with the Llewelyn Davies family in a private setting: balancing spoons on his nose during a private but formal dinner with the Llewelyn Davies family, playing pirates at his summer cottage, imagining that the boys bouncing on their beds could fly out of their nursery, and participating in games of cowboys and Indians in the Llewelyn Davies’ garden.

Barrie is also an interesting case in that there are a few points where his professional and private worlds overlap to some extent. Barrie (in both *The Lost Boys* and *Finding Neverland*) is often shown jotting down notes for his writing, which are assumed to be (or stated outright as) derived from the leisure time he spends entertaining the boys. In this idyllic situation, Barrie’s leisure naturally begets his work.

However, there is a clear work and leisure distinction for Barrie. When the Barrie of *Finding Neverland* is in a public and professional setting (i.e., meeting with Charles Frohman to discuss the production of *Peter Pan*, managing the stage and crew, sharing pleasantries with theater-goers during the after party, etc.), regardless of the fanciful subject matter, his demeanor
and mindset are always presented as appropriate to the public setting. Even for private concerns that influence adult public life, such as health, Barrie has a practical and mature perspective.

One scene that beautifully illustrates Barrie’s paradoxical maturity is his brief argument with Sylvia on the opening night of *Peter Pan*. She accuses him of teaching their family that “we can change things simply by believing them to be different.” His response, though brief, is telling: “A lot of things, Sylvia, not everything.” With one line he reveals that as whimsical as his behavior may be in private life, he understands the limits of a childish and/or imaginative mindset as well as the appropriate time and place for adult behavior. Barrie’s respectful maintenance of this line proves him to be an adult, rather than a child trapped in an adult’s body.

Barrie’s child-like whimsy is therefore permissible because it is always understood to be only play and limited to moments of leisure. At times it may manifest in unconventional or inconvenient moments, however those instances are limited to spaces of quotidian life and leisure. He gets into trouble when his private behavior is spread about as gossip, but in terms of his own behavior, Barrie is childish in private and mature in public. Given Barrie’s position as a member of the leisure class, that is the only appropriate context for such behavior. Therefore, in his work, he is eminently professional and practical. In terms of production, funding, and even audience reception, Barrie understands that regardless of his vision, his failure has the potential to ruin his producer-friend. His creativity and childish tendencies do not bleed into or negatively influence his professional life. They are strictly controlled. And in fact, his moments of whimsy are represented as merely times of heightened intellectual thought to enrich his work.

The same cannot be said for Dodgson’s behavior in *Alice I Have Been*. In fact, despite his identity as a writer, he is rarely depicted writing (or producing, in the economic sense). His behavior is classified early on by other characters as odd and inappropriate. As Alice recalls her
mother saying, “that nuisance of a mathematics tutor, a more obtuse man I have never met” (Benjamin, ch. 1, ¶73). This referenced obtuseness is reflected in a private conversation that Mrs. Liddell has with a mutual acquaintance about how, unknowingly, Dodgson set off a flurry of rumors that he was courting the Liddell’s nursemaid. Even as a Dodgson fan, Alice identifies the author as inappropriately submissive to the girls’ whims as “our playmate, our guide on many excursions, our galley slave” (Benjamin, ch. 1, ¶69). Rather than using the children as conduits to channel or inspire his art, Dodgson is portrayed as a man wracking his brain in order to please and serve his child companions. As such, he is not a figure who respects or even understands the socially regulated distinction between children and adults.

These fictions act as homilies. As each narrative unfolds, the audience is given a “true” story about an inherently child-like figure who, as an adult, must deal with the day-to-day consequences of being a grownup, while also occasionally indulging in behavior more commonly associated with children to both positive and negative effect. The rationale behind his decisions and ultimately his mature and socially informed impulse control dictates our reception of the author-character. This context is paramount when we consider the prurient underbelly of these authors’ interactions with their muses.

Foucault and the Ineffectual Silence of Child-Love

The greatest risk in representing an adult character who is able to speak the language of children and understand their mindset is that, often, a man’s interest in a child that has no prior relationship with him is inherently understood to be abnormal. As discussed in the previous section, one way to alleviate the immediate signification of danger is for the adult to behave in a manner appropriate to his age. Once again, however, this presents a complication in the case of Dodgson and Barrie as child-like figures well suited to and well liked by children. This tension
between creative and childish impulse and responsible, rational, adulthood runs through the Peter and Alice origin stories.

For instance, in *Finding Neverland*, Barrie has the aforementioned conversation with Michael, who is lying under the bench upon which Barrie is seated. *Alice I Have Been* has a short scene where Dodgson asks Alice if she would please put on a beggar girl dress sans petticoat or chemise for a picture. And in fact, several adaptations (notably *The Lost Boys, Dreamchild*, and *Still She Haunts Me*), feature scenes of Dodgson or Barrie posing, directing, and photographing children while looking at them intently for long periods of time. While there is nothing inherently harmful or abusive about the listed scenes, it is not immediately clear how much of it is an adult entertaining children with harmless games or an adult abusing his authority by directing and manipulating children. There is a lingering question of whether the scenes could be interpreted as less innocuous than they first appear.

In *Finding Neverland*, George interrupts Barrie’s conversation with Michael almost immediately, after which Jack, and then their mother, joins them. Regardless of Barrie’s intentions, within the logic of the scene, Michael is safe and surrounded by his older family members who will keep him safe. The public setting and sheer number of people dedicated to Michael deems that Barrie, as a rational adult, must act in accordance with proper adult behavior. Although he later indulges in a dance performance for the Llewelyn Davies boys with his oversized dog Porthos, he does so only after obtaining their permission.

Alice, however, is alone with Dodgson in the beggar girl scene, which is immediately disturbing and uncomfortable, despite Alice’s stated pleasure in his company. There is no guarantee that, outside of the watchful surveillance of public strangers or Alice’s private sphere, Dodgson can curb his childish whimsicality and act in accordance with his adult propriety. In
both of these cases, then, the unseemliness or reasonableness of the authors’ actions is settled by the degree to which the adult adheres to social norms appropriate to his age and standing when in the presence of children.

Yet, if we consider Freud’s explanation of taboos and the people who are at risk of enacting them, it helps to contextualize the care with which these men are separated from the children they admire. In *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, Freud writes,

> We have heard, though without understanding it, that anyone who does what is forbidden, that is, who violates a taboo, becomes taboo himself. How is this to be brought in line with the fact that taboo attaches not only to a person who has done what is forbidden but also to persons in particular states, to the states themselves, as well as to impersonal objects? What can the dangerous attribute be which remains the same under all these different conditions? There is only one thing it can be: the quality of exciting men’s ambivalence and tempting them to transgress the prohibition (38).

Therefore, simply by representing these men with children (persons in particular states), the producers of these fictional origin stories tempt not just an interpretation of potential child abuse in this particular historic case, but also, on a larger scale, tempt the audience to consider the very existence of child abuse and to thrill at its transgressive nature. As Freud puts it, “a person who has not violated any taboo may yet be permanently or temporarily taboo because he is in a state which possesses the quality of arousing forbidden desires in others and of awakening a conflict of ambivalence in them” (38). In this sense, it is almost incidental whether these men are shown
in the company of children at all, as the possibility of sexual abuse, once raised, becomes a
tantalizing potential reality.

Therefore, producers of such scenes (directors, authors, etc.) must make a concerted
effort to ensure these authors are unequivocally understood as harmless through a thorough
contextualization that attempts to negate even the possibility of taboo. In narratives like Finding
Neverland and Alice I Have Been, this effort is important, given the frequency of such
ambiguous instances of potential. The fastest and simplest manner to achieve an innocent and
univocal reading is to avoid the issue altogether. In the case of Alice and Peter, Victorian and
Edwardian social mores are a convenient deterrent to ambiguous and threatening moments by
dictating people’s social lives by stringent rules. Given the rigid social strictures governing how,
where, when, and with whom a person was able to socialize, most well-to-do children (such as
the Llewelyn Davies and the Liddells) were under near-constant surveillance and bound by rules
of propriety.

This is reflected in Alice I Have Been; with the exception of the photography scene with
the beggar girl dress mentioned earlier, young Alice and Dodgson are never entirely alone. All of
the Liddell girls’ outings are strictly regulated. On the rare occasion that Dodgson and Alice are
outside of Alice’s home without her nurse or siblings, they are either in public or in the company
of other adults. In this way, the threat of sexual abuse is neutralized, for the circumstances leave
no opportunity for inappropriate sexual urges to be expressed.

Finding Neverland is particularly careful in its portrayal of Barrie and any of the
Llewelyn Davies boys because the nature of the medium invokes this threat of abuse in any
scene or even shot that involves a lone Barrie with a single child. In this sense, the visual
immediacy is a double-edged sword. Through a film, a viewer can observe a narrative as it
unfolds from moment to moment. However, that same immediacy makes even seconds of an ambiguous threat terrifying. Therefore, if narrative necessity calls for Barrie to be shown with only one of the boys, the scene must also supply an explicit and univocal reading that denies any impropriety altogether in order to defuse the shock and threat of the represented moment.

There are several visual methods available to achieve this single reading. One is by establishing physical boundaries. From early on in *Finding Neverland*, scenes involving only Barrie and one of the Llewelyn Davies boys (typically Peter) enforce a border of inviolable distance between the two, even while they are in conversation. Even when in close quarters, where the two are seated beside each other, they rarely touch. In this way, the directors and producers are careful to maintain the sanctity of Barrie and Peter’s difference. The film is also careful with its blocking and entrances—in almost every case, it is the boy who, from a far distance, approaches the man; very rarely does Barrie seek out the attention or company of a single boy. However, this careful consideration and conscious denial of the potential for pedophilic desire through vigilance and contextualization offers an alternative understanding of what is happening in these texts.

As Michel Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality*, there are several ways to interpret the avoidance of particular topics, subjects, ideas; he calls this avoidance a form of silence. He argues that,

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies (27).
To ground his argument in a concrete example, Foucault looks at 18th-century secondary schools and the assumption of the schools’ institutional moratorium on sexual discourse. However, Foucault argues that this obsession with keeping sexuality a distinct, separate entity and by organizing space in such a way that students of different genders would not intermingle, the very architecture of the schools is preoccupied with the idea of sex (27-28). Therefore, rather than considering repression as the impetus for sexual proliferation, Foucault argues that the attempt to repress is, on its own, a sexual expression.

To consider this argument within the context of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, then, the question shifts from asking what is being repressed (pedophilia), to considering how the idea of pedophilia is being expressed (repression). Ironically, the best way to illustrate this idea of a deliberate and meaningful denial (expressive silence) is to describe a scene that lacks that same thoughtful contextualization of the situation. Without any opposing discourse in these particular moments, the unspoken threat appears obvious. Following this logic, then, the most threatening of the lone-adult-and-child scenes are the ambiguous ones that do not immediately present either context or the child’s consent immediately.

The most electrifying example of this obvious and yet tacit threat in Finding Neverland is a scene with Barrie and five-year old Michael, the youngest and smallest of the boys. Foreboding, quiet music plays as Barrie creeps in the underbrush, dressed as a pirate. Alone, Michael peers through the bushes in an attempt to spot movement, but Barrie is behind him. There are sounds of wildlife and the music mounts in tension as Barrie creeps closer. Barrie’s pirate clothing and the jungle sounds emitted from the British countryside provide context and serve as reminders that this is a game of pretend. However, these hints are insufficiently reassuring, and the tension ratchets as the camera begins to zoom in on Barrie. He is gaining
ground on Michael, who is unaware of Barrie’s approach. The tight, claustrophobic zoom sets off warning bells as the grown man stalks the little boy.

The camera toys with that uneasiness by prolonging it during Barrie’s advance, however the tone shifts at the exact moment of revelation when Barrie is upon the child. After all, he cannot be portrayed as an actual predator. The camera opens to a friendly wide-angle shot as Barrie exposes himself with a dramatic, uncharacteristically uncouth shout: “‘ello!” There is no attempt at touching or grabbing Michael, and Barrie’s shout announces not only his presence, but also that Barrie’s earlier disturbing actions were wholly in the service of the game.

This precaution (and contextualized reveal) is rewarded when Michael gasps in surprise and giggles, thereby showing his agreeable response to the situation as well as his consent. The threat is banished. And in fact, the film appears to agree, as in the moment of the reveal, the camera takes a 180-degree jump and goes from representing the slowly approaching Barrie moving from the left to the right (the villainous approach), to a standing, motionless Barrie on the right (heroic stance). Although Barrie threatens Michael in the voice of his pirate persona, the boy laughs.

The entire scene lasts about twenty seconds. Despite its brevity, however, the scene is anything but simple. Every one of Barrie’s actions is deliberate and openly non-threatening—as it must be—in order to dispel the fear of inappropriate desire. The makeshift pirate never lays a finger on Michael and stays several paces away. The author is shown to respect, again, the boundaries between adulthood and childhood. As an adult, he is trespassing on children’s territory, but he never oversteps his bounds to touch the boy. Even when he has taken Michael “captive,” Barrie simply ushers him along with a wave of the sword and a hearty “Off to the ship with you, then!” and the scene changes to a pirate ship on a sea of rollicking, artificial waves.
From Barrie’s verbal and physical cues to Michael’s response, every aspect of that scene is tailored to represent, with artificial ease, the absence of pedophilic tendencies and concerns.

However, despite this level of care to reject Michael’s immediate sense of danger, the scene suggests the possibility of lingering doubts about Barrie’s relationship with these boys. Given the severity of the charge, it is not enough to represent subtle dismissal of the pedophilic accusation. Instead, at least once, the film must portray the most visible and obvious form of this attempted repression of pedophilic readings of J. M. Barrie through explicit denial.

In Finding Neverland, this denial occurs during a conversation between Barrie and his friend Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at a cricket game. Doyle alerts Barrie to a series of rumors going around about Barrie’s relationship to the Llewelyn Davies family. Although Barrie dismisses the notion of any impropriety between himself and Sylvia with casual grace, he is taken aback when Doyle adds that there have been rumors circulating about his relationship with the boys as well. Doyle says, “There have also been questions about how you spend your time with those boys and why.” Barrie’s shocked response is interesting and worth examining closer. He says, “That’s outrageous. How could anyone think something so evil? They’re children. They’re innocent children. You find a glimmer of happiness in this world, there’s always someone who wants to destroy it.”

Barrie’s response first addresses the people believing the rumors and labeling those individuals as evil for even entertaining the as-yet unspoken, but nonetheless immediately understood, charge. His second response is to emphasize the innocence of children. Finally, he speaks of his own experience and how his relationship with those boys has afforded him a “glimmer of happiness.” When considering the exchange as sexual (and specifically pedophilic) discourse, Barrie’s defensive response functions in a number of ways: first, by asserting the guilt
of the accusers to deny the existence of his; then through context by claiming the inherent
innocence of children; and finally, by questioning the motives behind the accusations. Barrie
then closes the discussion by stating that he doesn’t believe that “many will give credence to
such nonsense.”

Interestingly enough, while each response speaks to the author’s ire, none of those
reactions are denials. To return to my earlier point from Foucault, this reaction is an expressive
silence. While it is possible that the director wanted to avoid having Barrie protest overmuch, the
dialogue and delivery still leave enough space for the potential threat of pedophilic interest.
Despite the numerous painstaking methods to reject pedophilic tendencies that have been
meticulously maintained throughout the film and despite the man’s bald rejection of the charge,
the threat remains, however.

*Finding Neverland*’s Barrie, however, has the benefit of a film’s worth of context to point
to his innocence. Foucault’s expressive silence, in this case, also speaks through Depp’s
interpretation of Barrie. As suggested by the use of Foucault, despite the denial of pedophilic
tendencies in this Barrie, the expression of pedophilia still comes through. However, precisely
because the film attempts to negate all pedophilic readings through numerous methods (and
eventually succeeds through the slow accumulation of context), the pedophilic reading of Barrie
in this particular film is an alternative, and ultimately unsubstantiated one. This denial of the
expressive silence is only somewhat effective.

To return to Foucault’s example of the school as an expressive response to sexual ideas,
despite the fact that the resulting building proclaims, “There is no sex in this building,” in order
for it to have that shape, the foundation must have been based on an initial sexual concept (i.e.,
architects prepared for the separation of genders). In a similar manner, although Depp’s portrayal
is eventually cleared of wrongdoing (i.e., he is not sexually attracted to children), his performance and the construction of the entire film is predicated on presenting him as perfectly innocent. In this sense, despite the film’s success in proving that Depp’s protagonist is innocent, it does not adequately allay our fears that Barrie, the historical figure, was not.

*Alice I Have Been* takes an alternate approach to the subject. Unlike the outright denial of pedophilia for Barrie or the visually maintained (and contextualized) constant distance between Barrie and his boys, *Alice I Have Been* must make other arrangements to deny Dodgson’s improprieties through language and perspective. Benjamin’s book accepts Dodgson’s pedophilic leanings in the narrative, but it defuses the threat of pedophilic abuse primarily through consent, by representing Alice as an infatuated seven year-old.

To normalize this fairly startling situation, Alice is not alone in her affections; her older sister Lorina (called “Ina,” age ten) and her age-appropriate twenty-something nursemaid Ms. Prickett are also enamored with the soft-spoken, gentlemanly Dodgson. This strange, three-person rivalry is a cause for distracting tension in their household and day-to-day interactions. As Alice notes, “Astonishingly, it was Mr. Dodgson who was responsible for all this, all these secrets and smiles and [Ms. Prickett] crumpled on the floor, her hands in her face, the pointer trembling above me, Ina’s wild laughter, the fear, the confusion” (Benjamin, ch. 2, ¶77). The drama and resulting “secrets and smiles” diverts the readers’ attentions from the fact that two of the three “women” in this rivalry are preteens. However, Alice and Ina set aside their little rivalries when coaxing their mother into letting them go on outings with Dodgson. This point is significant. The girls’ pleasure in Dodgson’s company must be clearly defined as the girls’ pleasure, rather than Dodgson’s. If the girls chase after Dodgson, then they are being frivolous
children; to reverse the circumstance and have Dodgson chasing after the children for his own pleasure would color the interpretation as disturbing and indecent.

As mentioned earlier, the Alice character from Benjamin’s book is more often supervised than not. Yet despite her near-constant supervision, the sense of a burgeoning illicit romance overwhelms the first third of this narrative while Alice is still a young girl. Through the first-person perspective of the novel, the reader is inundated with Alice’s glowing description of Dodgson’s appearance and the shocking intimacy of their wrists touching as they walk hand in gloved hand. Dreamily, as Alice ages from seven to ten and becomes more aware of her body, her gender, and her inevitable coming-of-age, she considers the kind of future she could have with Dodgson. In her young eyes, “Mr. Dodgson most resembled a hero of a romance novel” and she was only too glad to dream up a fairytale ending for the both of them (Benjamin, ch. 5, ¶11). However, given Alice’s young age and subsequent inability to give informed consent, this tactical move to use Alice’s adoration as implicit consent is understandably less successful in completely neutralizing the readers’ discomfort, which is only partially circumvented by the Victorian ideologies that limited social access to children by non-family members. Throughout the novel Alice is both chaperoned and self-governing in her obedience to strict rules of conduct. Even if Dodgson held some questionable desires, and even if Alice mirrored them, most of the circumstances as portrayed in Benjamin’s novel never allow for anything further than a complicated yearning.

Given the tremendous amount of exertion on the part of the textual producers to deny the threat of pedophilic abuse, there is more to these texts than Foucault’s expressive silence. And in fact, Foucault himself argues, in his discussion of the discourses on childhood sexuality,
The child’s “vice” was not so much an enemy as a support; it may have been designated as the evil to be eliminated, but the extraordinary effort that went into the task that was bound to fail leads one to suspect that what was demanded of it was to persevere, to proliferate to the limits of the visible and the invisible, rather than disappear for good (42).

Although Foucault refers here specifically to any indication of childhood sexuality, rather than pedophilic tendencies, the thrust of his argument is relevant. By identifying the sexual vice (in the case of this chapter, pedophilic abuse) as a perpetual enemy that requires constant effort to combat, there is an extent to which this tireless effort through a series of explicit denials requires the vice to persist. Our sociocultural expectations for these nonconventional relationships now necessitate an incredible effort to be put into these representations insofar as maintaining strict boundaries between adults and children, using particular language, and having both parties stay clear of certain behaviors. In our attempts to deny the potential for pedophilia, we’ve created a culture of obsession rooted in an impossible desire to eradicate a seemingly constant threat.

To return to the larger argument of this section, the image of a man with a child, without the benefit of context is understood immediately as a threat. In order to combat this ever-present threat, stories such as the origin narratives for *Peter Pan* and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* must therefore supply an unending stream of context both situational and consensual so as to alleviate the audience’s fear. However, the most conclusive method to obtain a univocal reading is by asserting the authors’ adult heterosexual desires and assessing their ability to act on them. *Butler and the Invisible Blinders of Heteronormativity*

As discussed in the previous section, the origin stories deny the potential for pedophilia differently based on which author’s story they are recreating. *Finding Neverland* denies the
potential for Barrie’s pedophilic tendencies by offering context and maintaining a constant visual boundary between him and the boys. Dodgson, on the other hand, is understood to be romantically interested in Alice in the novel *Alice I Have Been*. However, this situation is normalized by Alice’s reciprocation of his affections, Carroll’s desirability, and the social mores of Victorian high society that demand the constant supervision of young girls.

However, despite their divergent methods of addressing and denying pedophilic desire, both *Finding Neverland* and *Alice I Have Been* come to the same answer to close off the threat of pedophilic potential; it is rejected through the expression of mature heteronormative desire. This understanding of heterosexuality as a constructed norm is indebted to Judith Butler’s conceptualization of gender. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler famously theorizes about gender construction to consider what she calls “culturally intelligible grids of an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality” (377). The cultural intelligibility of norms and the assumption of a shared normality cause heterosexuality to not only be reflective of the majority, but also be compulsory in the sense that non-heterosexual identities are considered not only out of the ordinary, but also less than ideal.

The justification for this arbitrary formulation of a standard model for sexual identity and gender is reproductive capability. Heteronormativity serves to establish both norms and boundaries in “the interests of the heterosexual construction and regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain” (Butler 377-378). By identifying normative sexuality as heterosexual with the express purpose of reproduction, all other forms and expressions of sexuality that fall outside of that restriction are therefore abhorrent.

With these ideas in mind, Barrie’s case breaks two taboos of sexual normativity—sexual desire for children and homosexual desire. To combat this charge but maintain his identity as a
children’s author, Barrie must not only be represented as heterosexual and attracted to age-appropriate women, he must also be sexually appealing to age-appropriate women. The first step of this representative shift for Finding Neverland is the casting of Johnny Depp. Through Depp’s portrayal, the audience receives an image of Barrie as a tall, thin, attractive man with an imposing figure and charming personality. By virtue of his attractiveness, any oddity is reframed as charm. In this way, Finding Neverland’s Barrie is seen as a normative adult with peculiar interests (who is attracted to and attracts other normative adults with whom he could feasibly reproduce), rather than a peculiar adult with immoral impulses (and no reproductive future). However, in order for Barrie to ward off two taboos he must not only be heterosexual, he must also be hyper-heterosexual.

Therefore, Barrie is not only married to a beautiful young actress, but he is also entangled in a chaste but affectionate relationship with Sylvia Llewelyn Davies, Peter’s mother. Although much of the film is based loosely on facts (names, events, etc.), the film takes certain liberties with dates in order to propel the narrative and emphasize Barrie’s hyper-heteronormativity. The Barrie-Sylvia romance is so vital to this enterprise that the film turns her into a widow before the narrative even begins. As mentioned in the brief summary of Barrie’s life, Barrie was “Uncle Jimmy” to the boys long before Arthur Llewelyn Davies succumbed to cancer. By reimagining Sylvia as a widow from the beginning of their relationship and portraying that connection as one of shared affection, love, and respect, Barrie becomes doubly innocent as neither a pedophile nor an adulterer. Sylvia cannot betray a dead husband, and (in both the film and in reality) Barrie’s wife Mary is the one to break their marriage vows and demand a divorce.

Even this divorce is tailored to the idea of Barrie’s overwhelming heterosexual desirability. His wife, Mary, makes a number of comments about Barrie’s inappropriate behavior
and inattentiveness to his husbandly duties. The film takes pains to portray the Barrie household as lonely and quiet, to the point that it emphasizes Mr. and Mrs. Barrie’s separate bedrooms in a number of scenes, despite the fact that separate bedrooms were quite common during that time period. Even Sylvia’s mother warns him against being too close to Mrs. Llewelyn Davies and scaring away romantic prospects for a second marriage to secure Sylvia’s financial future. And one of the rumors that Doyle tells Barrie in the aforementioned cricket scene is that Barrie spends more time with Sylvia than he does his own wife. Much like a romantic comedy, there are several obstacles standing in the way of their romance, the most lasting of which is Sylvia’s eventual death from cancer.

Despite the unpleasant end to their non-relationship, it is repeatedly suggested that Barrie and Sylvia are both cut from the same cloth and are fond of each other. They have the same nonconventional appreciation for imagination and creativity while having little patience for Victorian formal niceties. And in stark contrast to the cold scenes of Barrie and his wife cordially speaking to one another or eating together in silence, the viewer is treated to several intimate scenes of Sylvia and Barrie alone, confiding in each other. As mentioned earlier, although Mary eventually gives up on her marriage with Barrie, she tells him that her one desire was to one day see the world through his eyes and see Neverland. However, despite Mary voicing this desire first, Barrie takes great pains to fulfill this wish for Sylvia. He does this as a last-ditch effort to bring Sylvia some happiness before her passing by bringing the play—cast, setting, and crew—into the Llewelyn Davies’ living room for a private viewing.

However, this intrusion into the Llewelyn Davies house necessitates, once again, a contextualization of Barrie’s place in that family. To allay the audience’s fears of pedophilia, and to maintain Barrie’s good name with regard to his marriage and morals, the film has to construct
a new role for Barrie in the lives of the Llewelyn Davies. And in fact, this is achieved once again through Arthur’s premature death. The film leaves open a space for Barrie in the Llewelyn Davies family as a father figure and benefactor that the actual writer had to carve out for himself. In the absence of the Llewelyn Davies patriarch, fictional Barrie was able to step in to fill the lack. In this way, his heterosexual desire for Sylvia is unquestioned, and his relationship with the boys is highlighted as a purely paternal one. The possibility for a far more unseemly pedophilic desire compounded with homosexual desire is elided under the taken-for-granted obviousness of Barrie’s assumed heteronormative behavior.

Although there are times of slippage when this paternal desire leads to some uncomfortably forward moments in the film, they are often immediately addressed by emotional misdirection. By the end of the film, Barrie has been named a co-guardian of the Llewelyn Davies boys along with their maternal grandmother, and Barrie and Peter have a conversation that ends in Peter’s tears. Now that Barrie’s role in their family has been officially recognized and Peter is in need of paternal comfort, the socially contextualized author is able to draw the boy close to him. However, even these actions seem stiff and unpracticed at this, the advent of their newly defined relationship. By redirecting the audience’s attention to Peter’s emotional upset, the oddity of a too-intimate impulse is set aside through the audience’s concern for Peter.

Following the masculine codes of appropriate affectionate behavior, one arm goes on the boy’s shoulder, and the other goes on the boy’s chest, as if to hold his heart in place. Barrie takes Peter into his arms, but stiffly—one hand presses Peter’s head against Barrie’s own chest, while the other presses against the front of Peter’s coat. Held awkwardly in Barrie’s stoic arms, Peter bursts into tears. Barrie’s response is to squeeze Peter’s shoulder in consolation, in a manly manner, after which the two figures on the bench go transparent and fade, signaling the end of
the film as well as the end of conjectures about Barrie’s romantic intentions towards the
Llewelyn Davies boys and Peter in particular.

In *Alice I Have Been*, Benjamin paints a darker picture of a man who is trapped in
inappropriate love with a girl far too young for him. The novel is divided into three major
sections which allows the reader to see Dodgson through Alice’s eyes as she ages: Alice as
infatuated child, Alice as a young woman in bloom, and finally, Alice as an old woman. As Alice
continues to age and gain in life experience, the man she once saw as the hero of a romance
novel begins to shrink in stature.

The problem in Dodgson’s case is not heteronormativity, but rather Alice’s inappropriate
youth. As is obvious, Dodgson and Alice make a heteronormative couple, however the
abnormality introduced in their pairing is not simply due to the twenty-year gap in their ages, but
rather, her lack of years. When Benjamin’s Alice first begins exploring her feelings for Dodgson,
she is only seven years old. To Alice, his periwinkle blue eyes and capacity to understand her
desires made him all the more attractive to her. In the first third of the novel, Dodgson begins as
an idealized, romantic prince, greatly desired by almost every eligible woman who comes in
contact with him, despite a persistent and nervous stutter. Due to Alice’s limited perspective, the
only eligible women she knows are her older sister and her nurse. However, it should be noted
that Dodgson’s attractiveness to younger women only serves to contextualize Alice’s desire for
Dodgson, rather than enabling his desire for her.

Similarly, Dodgson is not able to act on his feelings for the young Alice, while Alice
subjects Dodgson to her whims constantly. Despite a few charged scenes where Alice and
Dodgson are left relatively unsupervised, the worst imposition to Alice by the older man is his
photography sessions. In particular, there is the aforementioned and considerably racy scene
where Alice changes into a beggar girl dress at Dodgson’s request. In it, the older man removes his ever-present gloves to help her undress, and his bare fingers graze her skin. While the scene is admittedly discomfiting to read, there is no overt sexual contact and despite Alice’s hyperawareness of Dodgson’s presence and her clothing, he does not physically abuse her. In fact, after he helps Alice put on the tattered dress he procured for her, he grows increasingly uncomfortable as he attempts to adjust it and abruptly leaves her side.

There are two compatible ways in which to read that particular scene. On the one hand, Dodgson is behaving as a man who understands that his desires are transgressive and does not have the heart to follow through on them. On the other hand, by contemporary standards (which are appropriate here, despite the novel’s genre, due to its publication date of 2010), Dodgson does not behave in a masculine manner. Not only is he unable to control his feelings, he is also unable to act on them. In both ways, Dodgson proves himself to be weak of character and spirit.

Unlike Barrie’s virile hyper-heterosexuality in *Finding Neverland, Alice I Have Been* portrays Dodgson as a nervous, emasculated wreck who is thereby rendered nonthreatening and ultimately harmless. Just as Johnny Depp’s disarming attractiveness is used to assuage audience fears of a pedophilic threat in *Alice in Wonderland* and *Finding Neverland*, Ian Holm plays an awkward, stuttering Dodgson to the opposite effect in the 1985 film *Dreamchild*. Unlike the two narratives that comprise the focus of this chapter, *Dreamchild* is a British film. Holm’s performance is worth mentioning precisely because his *Dreamchild* role as a socially maladjusted author is a spiritual reprisal of an earlier and far more disturbing performance as J. M. Barrie in the BBC miniseries *The Lost Boys* (1978). Instead of the tall, brooding young gentleman with soft, feminine curls, Holm plays Dodgson as a socially awkward man lost more in his own head than in the events unfolding around him.
Prophetically, Mrs. Liddell, as a strong, married, and womanly figure, has nothing but disdain for Alice’s “slender” adult friend. Alice grows more discomfited by her old friend as she ages. Given their difference in age, once Alice is a young, eligible woman, Dodgson is graying, limping, and old. His interest in seeking out the company of little girls, however, remains unchanged. It becomes clear to both the reader and to Alice that Dodgson’s ability to understand his young friends comes at the cost of his ability to socialize in a productive and normal manner with adults his own age. Yet, despite this distance, Alice is linked to him through Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland in a bond that she finds increasingly distasteful. She notes, “Still, he haunted me. Everywhere I went; everyone I met. His eyes, his words, were upon me always. Alice in Wonderland. I would never be anything but” (Benjamin ch. 8, ¶9).

Although Alice eventually outgrows the high drama of her youth and comes to terms with this connection to Dodgson, he only ever grows smaller in her estimation. By the time Alice is an older woman with three boys of her own, she describes him as old-fashioned, white-haired, and with a high-pitched voice. His absent-mindedness and nervousness around her sons only further distances Alice from the person she once held so dear. It also becomes clear that he, even in his old age, is haunted by the memory of her as a little girl and unable to engage with the grown woman in front of him. His physical weakness, emotional frailty, and ever-present stuttering present Dodgson as a mere shadow of the kindly man he once was in her youth—non-threatening, passive, emasculated, and utterly harmless, regardless of his proclivities for little girls. In the end, Alice glosses his death briefly, but he does not even get the benefit of a full scene. Instead, Alice relays that information in a single paragraph of prose. Although she recalls him fondly by the end of the book, and recognizes his gift as one of love, she seems to conclude
that she had a full and rich life separate from the one Dodgson had imagined for her so many years ago.

Fictionalized Histories and the Shadow of Mythologization

In the end, for these fictional origin narratives, the various methods these stories employ to deny child abuse serve as indications of the importance of this denial. Without the wholehearted rejection of the potential for child abuse in these narratives, contemporary audiences cannot justify their continued consumption of these stories. In a manner of speaking, continued consumption of well-loved Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan tales after a determination of pedophilic abuse could potentially create the impression of complicity in the abuse that these children could have suffered at the hands of these men.

Within this framework of necessary denial for continued consumption, the multitudinous methods to deny pedophilic abuse become sensible. If the assertion of similarity, shared imaginative impulses, and innocent friendship do not suffice, then it is necessary to provide context and consent. If, however, the thorough contextualization and representation of consent gesture towards the possibility of pedophilic abuse, then normalcy must be established through the evocation of social norms of heterosexual desire enacted through the performance of masculinity. And if even that final method fails, then the audience or reader is left with an understanding of these histories that colors every subsequent and past reading of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and Peter Pan with a previously unforeseen and then unforeseeable darkness.

Ultimately, the necessity of these narratives boils down to economics. Interest in Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland drive the demand for origin stories. However, in order to maintain the innocence of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland and disassociate them with pedophilic
abuse, we must also maintain that these origin stories are only about either unrequited love or uncomplicated paternal love. Otherwise, as previous consumers of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, we are unknowing accessories to a sordid history, which will discourage further economic participation and even further interest.
CONCLUSION

There's the totally biographical film of Barrie [...] or there's this fictionalized version, which I prefer, which is about how [...] he was inspired throughout the story. And for me, it was a more modern piece: it doesn't matter if it was there or someone else, but it was just about how he got inspired, the process of art and the mortality issue and so on and all that other different themes. [...] For me, it was about trying to capture that spirit of him.

- Marc Forster, director of Finding Neverland
Groucho Reviews Interview (2004)

The caption [of the beggar girl photo] said she was actually seven-year old Alice Liddell, the privileged daughter of Dean Liddell of Christ Church, Oxford, where Dodgson taught mathematics; she was also the little girl who inspired the classic Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. I wondered what happened to her, after she grew up. I wondered what happened between the two of them to result in such a startling photograph. I thought it might make an interesting story.

- Melanie Benjamin
A Note from the Author, Alice I Have Been (2010)

Many years ago, I came across the following in The Real Alice, Anne Clark’s biography of Alice Liddell Hargreaves, the model for Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland: “On June 26, 1932 Alice opened the Lewis Carroll exhibition at Bumpus, the London bookshop. Beside her was Peter Davies, the original Peter Pan.” I wondered what they said to each other.

- John Logan
Peter and Alice (2013)

While doing the research for this thesis, what struck me as strangest about Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan as cultural indices was how little the original literary versions of Alice and Peter actually mattered. Sly and headstrong SyFy Peter was already an adolescent before becoming immortal and he was attracted to Tiger Lily. Hogan’s Peter was selfish, shirtless, and dressed in leaves, but he was also American. In accordance with tradition, a British woman played an on-stage Peter in Finding Neverland, but the brief excerpted scenes of Peter Pan in the film showcased a gentle and kind Peter dressed in red leather and embroidered leaves. But Finding Neverland also had a historical Peter, who, according to the film, inspired Peter Pan. Who is Peter, if he can appear in any number of iterations and variations that look and behave nothing like he was and still be recognizable? This question is not limited to Peter’s identity, as
Alice has similar problems regarding her various representations as a girl, a woman, a Victorian child, an American judo instructor, and a simultaneously old and young Alice Liddell.

Based on these variable representations, audiences seem to be ambivalent to the specifics of the original literary Alice in Wonderland or Peter Pan. An aura of adventure, irrepressible youth, and oddity is more important than fidelity to any one detail; Alice can wear dresses that aren’t blue, just as Peter does not have to fly immediately. However, the aggregate details must still signify Wonderland or Neverland accordingly and nothing supersedes the notion that Wonderland and Neverland are places of youthful imagination. This unspoken prerequisite is reflected in the epigraphs chosen for this portion of my thesis, as suggested by the overlapping terms “inspire” and “wonder.”

Even in stories that purport to tell a narrative based on historical facts, the purpose of these stories is not veracity, but rather, wonder. Simply, these are stories that inspire, not inherently, but because of their positions as cultural indices that have, over time, come to signify imagination. Support for this ambivalent and yet univocal understanding of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan, is in the way even primary texts (whether literary or biographical) have become subordinate to the cause of imagination.

Peter and Alice Converge

The subordination of biographical fact and literary source material to an amorphous sense of wonder derived from Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland is brought to stunning clarity in a play that incorporates Alice, Peter, fiction, imagination, inspiration, literature, and history into a single narrative: John Logan’s *Peter and Alice*. Much like the project of this thesis, the play takes on both British and American influences. Although John Logan is an American playwright, the cast is made up of British actors and it debuted in London’s famous West End to much fanfare.
and critical acclaim. The third epigraph for this chapter doubles as the epigraph for the play and describes the play’s central conceit: an imagined historical moment involving Alice Hargreaves and Peter Llewelyn Davies. In *Peter and Alice*, Peter Llewelyn Davies and Alice Pleasance Hargreaves are grown up and still haunted by the fictional characters they had inspired as children.

This Alice is an old woman at the end of her life, while this Peter is a young man of thirty trying to figure out his adulthood. However, as adults who have grown up tormented by the larger-than-life characters they once inspired, it is unsurprising that Logan chose to include these mythical fictions as separate characters. Peter cannot be conflated with Peter Pan, nor Alice with Alice in Wonderland, as different actors play them both. Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, despite their identities as fictional characters, have their own impulses, motivations, and memories that are distinct from their biographical counterparts. Both doubly-fictional characters trapeze in and out of the scenes at will, scoffing at the silliness of adults, and teasing each other and their namesakes while reciting directly from their stories.

Llewelyn Davies and Hargreaves are also haunted by memories—not just of their childhoods and the artists who rendered them somehow important, but of their lives and the impact these narratives had on them. While the play is generally limited to the two Peters and the two Alices, Dodgson and Barrie make appearances, as do those tragically lost (Peter loses his brother Michael to suicide, and both Peter and Alice suffered losses to World War I; Peter a brother and Alice, two sons). Fiction and history blur as Mr. Llewelyn Davies and Mrs. Hargreaves have a play-length discussion that doubles as a trip down memory lane.

After this thesis’s exploration of the development of material culture, narrative adaptation, and the fictional representation of history and all of the disparate, interconnected
ideologies that influence each new shift, *Peter and Alice* is a beautiful and strange convergence of what makes Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan as cultural indices interesting, relevant, and recognizable to our contemporary moment. Peter Pan is dressed in a green tunic with ragged edges. Alice in Wonderland is in her blue dress and white apron. In Alice Liddell’s racism (she is exposed by her fictional counterpart) we can see the influence of imperialism. In Peter Llewelyn Davies’s alcoholism and philandering (he is exposed by his fictional counterpart) we can see the influence of hypermasculine ideology. And, as in the case of *Finding Neverland*’s Peter Llewelyn Davies, the audience is too distracted by the various sorrows and quandaries of *Peter and Alice*’s protagonists to consider the more insidious implications of their historical counterparts’ uniquely privileged positions as wealthy British imperial subjects.

Strangely, *Peter and Alice* presents a beautiful fiction based on John Logan’s curiosity about what could have “really” happened. The irony is that both characters complain about how people want to see only what they expect to see. Even in a story about the futility of living in the shadow of a story, Peter and Alice must still always be children, while simultaneously being their characters, in addition to reasonable, rational adults. This paradoxical expectation for a historically accurate eternal childhood reflects a selfish desire by Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland audiences for something that the fictional Mrs. Hargreaves and Mr. Llewelyn Davies cannot hope to deliver—a portrayal of individuals that we can reconcile with our contemporary understanding of what Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan should be—fictional, yet living embodiments of their cultural indices. It is therefore no surprise that in Logan’s play, that responsibility is shared between these historical figures and their fictional counterparts.

The inclusion of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland in a play about how these stories influenced the lives of their muses suggests that historical accuracy is not the only draw for
audiences, as the interest and curiosity that drives demand for these histories is based on the prominence of Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland in our cultural memory, rather than a desire for the truth. This emphasis on the importance of shared and treasured cultural memory, in conjunction with the myth of childhood innocence, helps to explain why, as the previous chapter argues, representations of these histories must portray Barrie and Carroll as harmless and loving, rather than threatening.

These fictional works must stress the innocence of these authors, not because of the tragedy and horror of abuse, but because consumption of these narratives would retroactively make contemporary consumers complicit with this long-dead, potential, and ultimately imagined abuse (I use the word imagined here not to provide a definitive answer as to the veracity of abuse, but rather as a reminder that the consequences of this abuse is one that is imagined by people aware of this history). *Peter and Alice* is no exception. There is a brief discussion that addresses the nature of their relationships with the authors, and both Peter Llewelyn Davies and Alice Hargreaves assert that although their respective adult friends did not physically abuse them as children, the two were burdened by feelings they could not hope to understand or reciprocate. The authors are then rendered misguided, jealous, and inappropriate, perhaps, but still innocent of physical abuse and innocent in their intent.

In the end, through the allure of their joint status as fictional and historical, Alice Hargreaves and Peter Llewelyn Davies become parables in Logan’s play. Alice is able to embrace her inner child, live on, and die peacefully in bed because she is a woman who “knows the way to Wonderland” (Logan 69). It seems like an odd sort of poetic justice then, when Peter declares himself “grown up” only to have the narration announce his inevitable death by suicide (69). As Peter Pan tells Alice in Wonderland, “Some years after that, Peter Llewelyn Davies
walked down into the Sloane Square tube station and threw himself in front of a train” (69). That is the final line of dialogue, before the scene ends with Peter slamming the door and denying Peter Pan’s outstretched hand.

The parable in this adapted history is in how the history is presented in the fiction. Although the play claims Peter’s suicide is “some years after” this meeting with Mrs. Hargreaves, it does not mention that while Peter’s suicide is accurate to his history, it happens more than thirty years after their meeting, when Peter is in his sixties. Yet, by framing their decisions and subsequent deaths in this manner, this fictionalized history seems somehow truer than the truth. Despite these characters’ deaths, the play proffers its audience a comforting fiction: that people can choose to accept the magic inherent in their day-to-day existence.

*Beyond Neverland and Wonderland*

John Logan’s play brings the cultural indices of Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan back full circle to their origins and neatly fuses the most evocative and relevant points of contemporary interest in these two characters. By including Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland as separate characters, Logan was able to incorporate the literary references and visual iconography long associated with these titles. Through the addition of the fictionalized biographies, historical facts, and author-characters, Logan was able to narrativize the life stories of Peter Llewelyn Davies and Alice Pleasance Liddell while also asserting the innocence of Barrie and Carroll. Logan’s skillful weaving of fiction and history into the play’s themes of mortality, art, and inspiration, recreate an updated approximation of the same innocent belief in magic and beauty that contemporary audiences have come to expect from *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*. 
As reflected in the disparate, yet compelling facets of Logan’s play, Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland, through their persistence and continuing development as cultural indices have become, to return to my earlier metaphor from the introduction, fully mature snakes. All works have the potential to develop Barthesian Texts, which would be the equivalent of a snake hatching. However, the development of a cultural index is predicated on both cultural relevance to the contemporary moment and continued interest in a certain work that enable it to not only persist, but also to develop and integrate itself into popular culture. It is not enough for a snake to hatch; it must go through several stages of moulting. Certain expressions associated with a particular story adapt while others fail, just as a snake’s pattern will persist as it sloughs off its scales.

However, the final and most important step in forming a lasting cultural index is the general public’s curation of that Text. Details are forgotten, changed, and adapted. The snake can moult (leaving details to be forgotten) and it can scar (introducing new expressions), thereby maintaining unanticipated change. However, the snake must continue to shed its skin or it will die. In this case, the ability of the snake to survive in the wilderness of our shared cultural memory is its adaptability and openness to change. This cultural Darwinism condemns certain expressions of the cultural index to die while others flourish. Just as certain cultural articulations such as themed ephemera (coloring books or children’s clothing with Peter Pan prints, etc.) are part of the cultural index, they do not always last. However, in exceptional cases, as with Peter and Alice, details are regained, and interest in the index is renewed, allowing it to persist. Although this is stretching the metaphor somewhat, this would be akin to the snake sloughing off some final scar tissue to reveal a pattern that was initially part of its design but had been hidden under older scales.
Ultimately, the cultural index requires a persistent blend of interest, curiosity, and creative vigor from a wide swathe of the general public within a particular point in time. Over time, it will take on qualities that are larger than the original literary work that it grew from. Only the most successful cultural indices are the ones incorporated into our language and our culture. Alice and Peter (just as Hamlet or Elizabeth Bennet) persist and live through our popular culture in a way that other stories simply can and will not.

In fact, Peter and Alice have developed so many different avenues of expansion within their cultural indices that the central conceit of Logan’s play is simply an amalgamation of familiar details associated with Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan that are blended together in a new way. This intriguingly strange-but-familiar cacophony then distracts from the play’s prurient underbelly, projecting a message that reflects the ideologies of our contemporary moment using the vehicle of Peter and Alice’s cultural indices. All of these memorable, evocative, and moving elements of the two narratives are mobilized to assert the pithy homily of “magic everywhere,” thereby buying into the commercial allure of a world made inspirational by one’s mere existence and participation, where privilege, class, politics, and historical context can be elided or ignored by simply accepting more optimistic realities. After all, only a hopeless cynic would deny the magical wonders of childhood creativity and imagination.
NOTES

1. From this point forward, Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland sans italics will be used to refer to Peter Pan and Alice in Wonderland as cultural indices, rather than specific publications. All publications will be italicized. Similarly, Alice and Peter will be used as shorthand for Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan respectively. Should the need arise to single out a specific articulation of these characters, it will be noted within the text.

2. I chose these particular examples either because of their familiarity (the sound of Disney’s Tinkerbell flying), association with popular culture (nineties nostalgia for mohawk-sporting Rufio), or contemporary relevance (Alice-themed Pinterest weddings). I found that the inaccurate-yet-beautiful quote tattoos are a fascinating combination of all three: they require an appreciation for Peter Pan or Alice in Wonderland in addition to an understanding of what those Texts signify. They are surprisingly popular and are often taken from film adaptations. However, the most fascinating aspect of the ‘inaccurate’ tattoo is that it would take a relatively short period of time to confirm whether or not these quotes were associated with Barrie, Carroll, or certain Texts, and yet, despite the permanence of this form of body art, they are enjoy a remarkable level of popularity.

3. An example of an entry that exists within the Text, but not necessarily in the cultural index or the work is Alice’s yellow dress. Although I will address this precise example further in Chapter One, to summarize my point, Alice’s dress in most of the earlier editions of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland lacked both color and description. The very first official colored print of Alice had her wearing a yellow dress. However, in the present day, Alice is expected to wear blue. Barthes’s Text would include all possible variations of Alice (including adaptations and
homages) in all of her various dresses, however, within our cultural index, Alice is largely remembered and recognized as a girl in blue.

4. An example of an introduced change that is maintained through multiple future iterations is the location of Neverland. As with the previous note, I will address this example further in a later chapter (Chapter Two). However, in brief, Barrie’s original address for Neverland was simply “Second to the right” and referred to an island on Earth. The addition of the word “star” was popularized by Disney’s animated film to the extent that most, if not all Peter Pan quote tattoos of Neverland’s iconic address include either the word “star” or a star illustration.

5. Otto Charles Thieme’s paper on Victorian and Edwardian women’s fashion helped to inform my incorporation of Presley’s work.

6. This connection between the allure of constraining women’s fashion and restrictive expectations for women’s behavior therefore makes some troubling suggestions about the state of current gender roles when considering the recent upswing in Alice in Wonderland’s popularity today.

7. Uncomplicated, in this sense, does not refer to the idea that gender roles were somehow simpler in the Victorian era, but rather that the social mores held both men and women to strictly gendered and inflexible modes of conduct, styles of dress, and social expectations, which, while still overwhelmingly evident in our contemporary era, are less clearly reinforced.

8. The costumes listed hereafter, Alice and otherwise, are taken from a number of costume websites and Google Image searches to account for both commercial and amateur interpretations of the characters’ appearance.
9. *The Little White Bird* and *Peter Pan or The Boy Who Would Not Grow Up* (the play) will henceforth be cited as acronyms in-text (TLWB and PP) to differentiate between this and Barrie’s other works. There are no page numbers listed as both texts are published without pagination as full texts online under the Gutenberg Project.

10. This key insight is one of the foundational pillars of performance studies.

11. The spectacle referred to here refers to the lay definition and is not to be confused with Debord’s spectacle, which in all cases will be qualified by his name in this thesis.

12. The most recent and obvious Alice addition, given its appearance in 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*, SyFy’s *Alice* miniseries, and ABC’s *Once Upon A Time in Wonderland* TV show, is the Jabberwocky (which, in both the source text and most mainstream Alice adaptations over the years prior to 2009, overwhelmingly existed as a creature in a poem rather than an actual Wonderland monster).

13. It is worth noting that Depp plays a similar role of normalizing the admittedly strange and unlikely May-December romance between Alice and the Hatter in Burton’s *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) as well.
WORKS CITED


*The Lost Boys*. Dir. Rodney Bennett. Perf. Ian Holm and Anna Cropper. BBC, 2006. DVD.


